

The Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Helsinki  
Helsinki

**THEY LOOK ME IN THE EYES AND I SMILE AND THEN WE KNOW**  
The Interaction of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in  
Finland

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Doctoral dissertation, to be presented for public examination with the permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki, in Auditorium PIII, University Porthania Building, on the 28th of September, 2019 at 10 o'clock.

Publications of the Faculty of Social Sciences, 120 (2019)  
Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences, Social and Cultural Anthropology

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Cover photo: Remus with Children and Henry Hedman in the autumn of 2015

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“THEY LOOK ME IN THE EYES AND I SMILE AND THEN WE KNOW”:  
The Interaction of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland  
PhD thesis © Lidia Gripenberg

Distribution and Sales:

Unigrafia Bookstore

<https://shop.unigrafia.fi/>

ISSN 2343-273X

ISBN 978-951-51-3396-0 (printed)

ISSN 2343-2748

ISBN 978-951-51-3395-3 (pdf)

Unigrafia

Helsinki 2019

## Abstract

This is an account of the interaction of Finnish Roma with East European Roma in Finland. I will argue that this interaction is strongly influenced by these peoples' engagement with Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity and nationality. Within the frame of this study, Finnish Roma refers to Finnish Kale, a distinctive group somewhat similar to the *sinti*, a branch of the European Roma population who live mostly in German-speaking countries. Finnish Kale have settled in Finland for more than 500 years: they are Finnish citizens and speak Finnish in addition to a local dialect of Romani. The East European Roma in Finland include representatives of different Roma groups, with different self-appellations, who have recently migrated to Finland from former socialist states of Europe, mostly Bulgaria and Romania, or who repeatedly visit Finland from those former socialist states. Pentecostal Finnish Kale have been in contact with East European Roma since the historic fall of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989 and the opening of the borders of the former Socialist European bloc countries to those European countries considered to be in the 'Western' bloc. The nature of that relationship changed at the beginning of 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania entered the EU and their citizens were able to visit and look for employment in Finland.

This is the first extensive anthropological study on the interaction of different Roma groups in Finland and in general. The subject is interesting because it provides an opportunity to examine the interplay of different forms of identity – ethnic, religious and national. The research is based on an ethnographic description of encounters between Finnish and Eastern European Roma in Finland that took place over a period of 14 months of intensive fieldwork (2014-2015), supported by the insights and understanding gained through more than 20 years of personal friendship with Finnish and Bulgarian Roma, as well as one and a half years of social work amongst Finnish Kale. The theoretical frame is provided by research literature on Roma in the fields of anthropology and ethnology as well as anthropological studies on ethnicity, ethnic identity, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity as well as nationality.

My argument is that the social dynamics between nationality, ethnicity and religious identification determines the particular kind of sense of belonging that Roma in Helsinki have, which in turn affects the type of relation members of different Roma groups feel towards one another. Through exploring multiple everyday interactions between this groups, I have been able to show that religious belonging is the key factor that draws different groups together, due to the mutual trust and obligation that such belonging entails.

The research contributes to the understanding of identity as a constantly ongoing process of identification as well as to the understanding of the role of spirituality in shaping people's course of life.

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## Acknowledgements

I want to thank the leader of the project “Language, Identity and Authenticity among Roma in Eastern Europe” at the University of Helsinki and my supervisor Professor Kimmo Granqvist, who gave me the idea that conducting a PhD study in anthropology is possible for a person holding a masters in engineering. As an experienced researcher and Docent in Romani Linguistics and later Professor in Romani Studies, Kimmo also provided valuable insights and guidance in the field of Romani Studies in general. I want to express my gratitude to Docent Anna Maria Viljanen, my first supervisor in anthropology and an expert in the research on Finnish Kale for her instruction on peculiarities of Finnish Kale traditions but also for the inestimable personal support she offered during the whole process. Last but by no means least of my supervisors, I want to thank Sarah Green, Professor and Head of the Discipline Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki, who guided me into the insights of contemporary anthropology and assisted me in developing a sound theoretical framework for the research. Sarah was generous and systematic in providing supervision time and constructive comments, which made the progress of the work possible. I am sincerely thankful to the pre-examiners of the thesis Professor Simon Michael Coleman and Assistant Professor Jan Grill for their constructive criticism and valuable suggestions for improvement of my work. I am deeply grateful also the Head of the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian studies Hanna Lehti-Eklund, who supported my work through providing employment at the department. Absolutely essential for publishing this work was also the effort of the language reviewers – Kenneth Quek and Päivi Berg, thank you for your kind support and expertise. I extend my cordial gratitude to all my Roma friends: Ivan Hristov and his family, Adele Hagert, Satu Longström, Armas Lindberg, Miranda Vuolasranta, Angelica Vironen, Esko and Ella Bollström and many more who opened the door for me not only to their homes but to their World and their hearts as well. Without them this research would never have taken place.



Thanks go to my teachers and colleagues at the University of Helsinki, Helsinki Deaconess Institute as well as the researchers in the field of Romani Studies for the many different kinds of assistance they provided. The list of names of people I am indebted to would be almost endless but here are some names I would like to mention in particular: Prof. Jukka Siikala, Prof. Timo Kaartinen, PhD Toomas Gross, PhD Minna Valtonen, MA Anca Enache, Tanja Lindström, Terno Theslund, PhD Raluca Bianca Roman, MA Mirkka Salo, Doc. Anton Tenser, MA Erika Adamova, Prof. Elena Marushiakova, Prof. Veselin Popov, Asst. Prof. Sofiya Zahova, Prof. Judith Okely, Asst. Prof. Jan Grill, PhD Tatiana Podolinska, MA Yana Moroz. All of you have contributed to the final shape of this work. I thank MA Anca Enache for numerous conversations on theory of anthropology and practical life with Roma. My gratitude to PhD Raluca Bianca Roman for comprehensive discussions on recent developments in the living conditions and customs of Finnish Kale as well as for reading and commenting on my texts. Special thanks to Prof. Elena Marushiakova and Prof. Veselin Popov for reading, commenting on and correcting my texts as well as for helping me gain a broader view on the life and practices of Bulgarian Roma in general. Many thanks to MA Mirkka Salo, Doc. Anton Tenser and MA Erica Adamova for being kind and supportive colleagues. Special thanks to my Helsinki Deaconess Institute colleagues Tanja Lindström and Terno Theslund for assisting me and being patient with me, while I was learning how to practise social work amongst Finnish Kale. The discussions with Prof. Judith Okely, PhD Tatiana Podolinska, Asst. Prof. Sofiya Zahova and MA Yana Moroz significantly broadened my understanding of the field of Romani Studies and the phenomena I was investigating.

I am also grateful to my husband and my son, as well as the rest of my family, who supported me in my work. Above all I want to thank my Lord Jesus for taking care of me and my family and giving me the understanding, strength and persistence to conduct this research.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Prologue: A Pitch-black Night and a Drill-cake – My Introduction to Roma Communities**

This story started back in the summer of 1995 when I travelled from my country of residence, Finland, to my country of birth, Bulgaria, together with a group of Pentecostals. About ten Finnish Pentecostals, half of whom were Finnish Roma (Kale) were going on a two-week evangelizing mission targeted mainly at Bulgarian Roma in the region of Nova Zagora. The mission was led by the prominent Bulgarian singing evangelist Peter Janev. Peter somehow had got to know that I had recently been converted to Pentecostalism and he contacted me to suggest that I become an interpreter for the group. As a new convert, very enthusiastic about evangelizing, I gladly agreed. The trip started with three days of prayer and fasting at a Lutheran camp in Eastern Helsinki. On a hot July afternoon we flew about 2500 km from Helsinki to Sofia and took a bus for about 260km further to the town of Nova Zagora and the small village of Korten in the South-East of Bulgaria.

By the time we reached Korten it was about 11 pm. Only then was I informed that I would be accommodated in the village in a Bulgarian Roma home, together with the Finnish Roma group, me being the only person of non-Roma origin. The rest of the group was staying in the town. This news troubled me a bit. The year was 1995. I had no mobile phone, no Skype, no connection whatsoever to my husband, my parents or anyone I knew: a woman in her late 20s, left alone with people I had never met before and with whom I had been threatened all through my childhood. “If you do not behave we will give you to the Gypsies,” went the familiar saying used by adults to silence mischievous children. So here I was in the middle of a pitch-dark night, in what felt like the middle of nowhere, given to “the Gypsies”. I looked to the sky and said in my heart “Lord may Thy will be done in my life. I trust You”.

What followed were two of the best weeks in my life: time that broadened my view of the world greatly and permanently, and hopefully my heart as well.

The host family consisted of two adult brothers in their 30s, Vasil and Ivan, with their wives and children and their parents: altogether six adults and seven children living in a medium-sized (in the local understanding) yard with two small houses, a garage, and a small garden. They accepted four of us: a Finnish Roma couple, Pekka and Riita, a single middle-aged Finnish Roma woman, Adele, and me. That evening at least 30-40 people from the Roma community of Korten gathered on the long covered terrace of Vasil's home to meet us. The hosts had prepared a dinner table covered with many kinds of tasty food. There was meat and vegetables cooked as several types of starters, salads and a main dish. The meal was crowned by a delicious cake, prepared by Dimitrinka, Ivan's wife. While we were eating the hosts played and sang Christian hymns and songs for us. The rest of the greeters admired the guests and their stunningly beautiful Roma outfits.

There was a good reason for admiration. The traditional<sup>1</sup> dress of Finnish Roma women, which they wear in everyday situations, consists of a black velvet skirt and glamorously decorated blouse. Back at that time most of the skirts were made from 27 metres of fabric – three layers of nine metres each. The men were dressed in black pressed trousers, white shirts and jackets and wearing patent leather shoes. For the local Bulgarian Roma, who were not destitute but clearly struggling to meet their daily needs, the newcomers were an impressive sight. Those people were Gypsies, just like them, and were apparently proud of that status.

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<sup>1</sup> While Finnish Kale themselves refer to their clothing as traditional, the current fashion of Kale clothes dates from the 1970-1980s. More detailed information of Kale women's dress can be found in the article of Viljanen (Viljanen 2012:380-388) and on Kale men's dress in the article of Stenroos (Stenroos 2012) in the same volume *Suomen Romanien Historia*.

During the socialist time most of the Roma in Korten had been employed in farming or small industries. The region is known for its vineyards and nowadays there is even a trademark named after it: “Korten Wines”. After the change of regime in 1989, Bulgaria faced a severe economic crisis and the first to lose their jobs were the Roma. Most of the Roma in Korten had managed to build their houses during socialist times, when wages were low but jobs were secure. Many of them had used the chance provided by the extremely high inflation at the historical turning point to pay off their house loans. At that stage, they had accommodation but financing their daily life was a problem.



**Figure 1 Finnish Roma Action Group with their hosts in Korten 1995.**

*From the right 1<sup>st</sup> Minka (Vasils wife), 2<sup>nd</sup> Ivan, 4<sup>th</sup> Lidia, 5<sup>th</sup> in front Dimirtinka. From the left 2<sup>nd</sup> Riita Roth, 4<sup>th</sup> in the back Pekka Roth, 4<sup>th</sup> in the front Adele Hagert.*

The only person In Ivan’s family who had a permanent job was Dimitrinka. She worked as a cleaner in a dairy for 10-12 hours per day and 6-7 days per week for quite modest wages, 200 euros per month. Ivan and the older children occasionally did seasonal work for a vineyard which had now become private and did not offer permanent employment. Vasil’s family was somewhat better off, since Vasil had acquired relatively high qualification as a construction worker while being in the army. Now he was

working privately but there were not so many customers who could afford to pay. A family was commonly considered fortunate if there were pensioners in the house. The grandparents' pensions were the only reliable income for the two households and they were reserved for paying the electricity and water bills. Adding financial anguish to the traditional, sometimes subtle but often bluntly and aggressively displayed dislike of the main population towards the Roma, one could only imagine how heartwarming the sight of their rich and beautifully dressed "brothers" from the West must have been.

The local Roma were glad to host their Far North visitors and they showed warm and unfeigned hospitality, which they called "Gypsy love", of which I also received my share. As a person serving them and enabling their communication, they treated me as their own.

Did they have their own agendas? Surely some of them did. Some people were constantly asking whether Finnish Roma could help them emigrate or start a business abroad. Keeping in mind the social and economic status they had in Bulgaria, their desires were more than understandable. Only later on did I learn that the host family had taken a loan in order to buy the food for the welcome feast. In addition, our host and the neighbours greeted us every morning with freshly-baked homemade pastries. They woke up very early to prepare treats like banitsa, tutmanik, and baklava – pastries traditional for Bulgaria and other Balkan countries, which take hours to get to the table. The luscious cake handiwork by Dimitrinka had been whipped with an electric drill. The family mixer had been broken for a while and there was no money to purchase a new one. Dimitrinka found a work around by borrowing this electric drill from a neighbour. All of us guests agreed that the "drill-cake", as we named it, was the best cake we had ever tasted and it became a symbol of the love with which we were surrounded during our visit to Korten.

The two weeks in Korten went quickly but they left indelible warm memories and friendships, many of which have stood the test of time. In the years to come, my family and I occasionally visited and hosted the Finnish Roma friends I got to know in Bulgaria. Through them, we became acquainted

with more Finnish Roma, mostly Pentecostals. One of the closest Finnish Roma friends I found was Adele. We often prayed together for her daughters, who at the time were youngsters “testing their wings and limits”. Almost every summer, when we visited Bulgaria, we stopped in Korten. Every time we met Ivan, he told me “Lidia, I want that our family comes to Finland to work.” And every time I replied, “Pray for it, if it is God’s will it will happen.” To be honest, I did not think it was very probable. However, times change, and at the turn of 2007, Bulgaria entered the EU. Bulgarians were not required to have work permits in Finland any more, the Finnish economy was still going strong and there was strong demand for unskilled laborers. Ivan and Dimitrinka got jobs in the cleaning company serving the office where I worked at the time and arrived in Finland in May 2008.

Now Ivan and Dimitrinka had the chance to become acquainted with Finnish Roma in their homeland. By chance one of Adele’s daughters, Satu, started to visit our church at about the same time. Her family had got into trouble due to an old feud and now she was alone, raising four children and quite alienated from the local Roma community. The two families became close friends and rendered each other support and comfort. Their only common language was Romani. Communication was far from easy, since the dialects they speak are considerably different. However, in time they gradually started to figure out the differences in pronunciation and discovered many common words. In the meanwhile, the newcomers diligently studied Finnish. Abstract or complicated issues still had to be handled with the help of an interpreter.

As I write this in the summer of 2018, Ivan and Dimitrinka and three of their children, along with their families, live in Finland. All of them are working, studying or caring for children. Over the last 20 years, most of the friendships established in the summer of 1995 have lasted and new ones have been made. They are the basic ingredients of the story that I am about to tell. What is this “Special Something” that makes complete strangers, born and living 2500km from each other in very different societies feel like

they belong together and call each other brothers and sisters? What does that relationship depend upon? Location, religious affiliation, social status, economic interest or something else? What is the key ingredient of the Dimitrinka “drill-cake” (a cake filled with whipped cream and jam and decorated according to the season with cream, fruits or candy) which we old friends still occasionally enjoy at their home in Helsinki? Even though they are now made with a proper Finnish mixer, her cakes still have the authentic “drill-cake” flavour we once enjoyed in the pitch-dark July night in Korten. In the spring of 2013, following the migration of what was then perceived as a considerable number of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma to Finland, I was offered the chance to conduct research on the relationship of Finnish Roma with East European Roma in Finland in connection with the project “Language, Identity and Authenticity among Roma in Eastern Europe” at the University of Helsinki. The goal of the project was to discuss the Roma living in Eastern Europe and to certain extent in Finland and to study the questions of diaspora, identity and hybridity from the point of view of political science, anthropology, migration research and anthropological and general Romani linguistics. Given the fact that I had several friends from Finnish and Bulgarian Roma and I had had the opportunity to work in a Helsinki Deaconess Institute Day Centre for Finnish Roma for one and a half years and to learn some Romani, I decided to take on the challenge.

## **1.2 Research Goals and Outline of the Study**

The *main goal* of this work has been to portray and analyze the interaction and the underlying sense of belonging of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland as it was lived in the daily life of the research participants as well as to identify the major influencing factors. The Descriptive Glossary of Terms Relating to Roma Issues of the Council of Europe (CE) states that “*The term “Roma” refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves*

as *Gypsies*.” (Council of Europe 2015:4-5). In this study, East European Roma in Finland stands for representatives of different Roma groups, with different self-appellations – for example *Kardarashi*, *Zlatari*, *Ursari*, *Badănari*, *Bulgarski Tsigani*, who have recently migrated from former socialist states of Eastern Europe to Finland, or who repeatedly visit Finland. When referring to Finnish Roma, I mean Finnish Kale. Finnish Kale are a distinctive group, somewhat similar to *sinti*, a branch of the European Roma population found mostly in German speaking countries. Their most significant traditions are the customs of respecting the elders and observing ritual purity, an essential part of which is wearing what is regarded by Kale as traditional clothing on all occasions when Finnish Kale elders might be present.<sup>2</sup> Each community, Finnish Roma and East European Roma, speaks a different variant of Romani or “Para-Romani”, a language of Indo-Iranian origin which was first described by Johann Rüdiger in 1782. “Para-Romani” is a linguistic term used in cases when Romani vocabulary (but not grammar) is taken into another language (Matras 2004:53-57). The Para-Romani spoken by Finnish Kale is called Fennoromani, a language form in which Romani-based words are inflected and included into sentences built according Finnish language grammar rules (K. Granqvist 2012).

My research is based on an ethnographic description of the encounters of Finnish and East European Roma that I witnessed during my fieldwork year. In order to enhance the understanding of those instances, the ethnography is backed up with narration of events that had taken place years earlier. Observing and analyzing those encounters, I have investigated how belonging is perceived and acted upon or alternately ignored / suppressed / hidden in different settings. The main ethnographic sites are National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF)<sup>3</sup>, a national organization of the European Roma and Travellers

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed information on the distinctive culture of Finnish Kale see Romanikulttuurin Muuttuvat Muodot Ja Pysyvät Rakenteet (Viljanen 2012, 375-425).

<sup>3</sup> National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF) is an umbrella organization for fifteen at the time Finnish Roma NGO:s.



Forum (ERTF), the Hirundo and Kaalo Day Centres of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute<sup>4</sup>, Pentecostal Gatherings organized by NRFF for East European Roma in Helsinki, Finnish Roma Pentecostal Gatherings as well as private gatherings.

My assertion is that most of the Finnish and East European Roma I have met share a sense of belonging to a specific community and mutual understanding. That, however, does not imply that both groups are willing to interact, cooperate with each other or even publicly acknowledge any kind of relatedness. In my experience, this sense of belonging, whenever present, is genuine and is understood to be hereditary, which is to say that people feel a person is Gypsy when he/she is born of Gypsy parents or at least one parent, preferably the father. “Gypsiness” is claimed to be seen in the eyes or felt in the heart, but most often it translates as a common understanding. As a Romanian Roma participant describing his encounters with unfamiliar Finnish Roma put it, “*They look me in the eyes and I smile and then we know.*” Belonging can easily be politicized or combined with economic and/or personal, even religious/spiritual, interests and these processes most certainly take place in real life encounters. However, pursuing interests alone is not the basis for the interaction of Finnish and East European Roma in Finland. Rather, the sense of belonging and the perception of commonality of culture, combined with specific triggering factors, provide the base for different types of communication. My observations confirm the statement of Bashkow: “People’s perception of a commonality of culture is founded more on relations of mutual comprehension than on actual sameness of identity” (Bashkow 2004:452). The study analyzes the major factors influencing the outcome of the encounters of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland, based on approximately 14 months of intensive formal fieldwork during the period of May 2014-October

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<sup>4</sup> Helsinki Deaconess Institute is a non-profit foundation offering social welfare and health services to people at the risk of social exclusion.

2015, in addition to twenty years of personal friendship with Finnish Kale and Bulgarian Roma and one and a half years of social work among the Finnish Kale.

At the onset of formal anthropological research, leaning on previous experience I was fairly convinced that Roma ethnic identity is the major factor uniting different Roma groups and providing a base for the feeling of belonging and willingness to interact. Getting acquainted with earlier research on Roma and finally entering the field in the role of a researcher, rather than a friend, made me realize that my presumption was largely applicable to Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian Roma but not to all Roma. In fact I realized that non-Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian Roma were more prone to avoiding representatives of other Roma groups on a daily basis, even though in most cases they recognized the other group – as described by Stewart (2015:748) – as “fellow Roma” but at the same time defining them as “not our type of Roma”. This finding inspired me to search for other factors influencing the relationship. Consequently, I was able to identify Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and nationality as major additional influencing factors.

The theoretical background for this study is based on a rough literature review of the studies on Roma identity for the last 50 years, using a multidisciplinary approach. For the analyses of fieldwork data, however, I lean mainly on scholarly work in anthropology and ethnology. During different historical periods, Roma identity has been studied from different theoretical vantage points. In Chapter 2 I analyze Roma identity as lived by the informants from different theoretical standpoints utilized in scholarly work: Roma identity as inherited, constructed through social interaction, as expressed and performed, as common understanding, as a tool for ethnic mobilization. I see using different theoretical approaches for analyzing a social phenomenon as analogous to the way that physical objects are portrayed from different perspectives in technical drawing. In technical drawing a minimum of six perspectives must be drawn on paper, which is a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object. Each of these six

perspectives usually looks different from the others, except for strictly symmetrical objects, but the object is still the same. Similarly, we can use different theories to analyze a social phenomenon and the outcomes of the analyses may produce diverse images of the phenomena, while the phenomenon itself persists unchanged. The lived experience of informants is always multidimensional and scholarly work can capture a limited number of aspects at a time. What is essentially different in technical drawing and research in social sciences is that, while in the first case objects are only portrayed but not altered, the outcome of the research may and often does influence and transform the social reality it portrays. Furthermore, as people are active agents in forming their social reality, rather than passive objects, in the case of social research the portrayal itself may influence what and how is being portrayed.

### **Roma Identity**

Based on research data, I suggest that, in the view of the Roma I came to know in Helsinki, Roma identity can only be acquired through ancestry, both for Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Finland. A non-Roma person who had married into a Roma family could be approved by the community and even perform Roma identity but would not be considered as a “*true Gypsy*”. Previous studies in different Roma, for example by Gay y Blasco, Okely and Vilajanen, report similar results. An outsider can be “treated as our own” in a specific Roma group and become a “tolerated outsider” as noted by Silverman (1988, 264), but will remain an outsider. According to the participants of the research, their Roma identity is always transferred through inherited “Gypsy blood” and is thus hereditary. While mundane encounters provide plenty of evidence that specific inherited physiognomy features often cause the surrounding population to ascribe a person Roma identity, embracing and performing Roma identity is still to a large extent a question of personal choice. Sustaining a viable identity requires adequate expression and/or performance. A person or a group may lose their Gypsy identity if they fail to perform it. Gay y Blasco describes how Gitanos may become *apayados* (Gay y Blasco 1999:175); similarly, in her ethnography

of Finnish Kale, Roman (2017:136) reports cases of lost Kale identity. In the current study, informants would characterize members or a part of the community as not real Gypsies “ei o oikeita mustalaisia”, “това не са вече никакви цигани (those are not Gypsies any more)” since they did not perform their Roma/Gypsy identity. Like other identities, Roma identity may be situational, that is, people exercise judgment on whether and how to perform it depending on the situation, providing there is a legitimate choice. East European Roma groups, who do not wear what they regard as traditional clothing<sup>5</sup> and whose cultural traditions are close to those of the majority population, often chose situationally which identity to perform. Amongst the Finnish Kale, there are individuals who perform majority population Finnish identity in their place of employment but Kale identity within the circle of kin and friends.

In most cases, the informants had a clear understanding that cultural traditions are specific to each Roma group and may vary considerably. On the occasions when representatives from different Roma communities were assessing each other's identity, the evaluation most commonly centred on kinship, language and very importantly shared understating, as stated by Bashkow (2004:452), as well as similar values based on “core Roma culture”, as noted by Hancock (2010, 23-24). That shared understanding was often referred to as the “Gypsy heart”, which feels for its brethren and supports them regardless of the differences between them. Most of my informants did not show much interest in the origin and history of Roma. Some of them (usually Bulgarians) even questioned the validity of the term Roma as such. They felt that, as Gypsies, they belonged to their own group and strongly doubted whether a common appellation as Roma would improve their present or future living conditions. Roma activists and Roma Pentecostals showed more interest in the history and origin of Roma. Roma activists were often in favor of the hypotheses of Indian origins, whereas Roma Pentecostals found the thesis of Roma

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<sup>5</sup> Different East European Roma groups have different ideas on what is “traditional Roma clothing” but for several of them that includes long skirts for women and covering the hair of a married woman with a scarf. This is, for example, the case for Bulgarian Kardarashi and Romanian Badánari.

being the lost tribe of Israel to be better justified. They saw significant similarities in the purity rules of Jews and Roma and ascribed the presence of Sanskrit vocabulary in contemporary Romani to a later period of migration through India. Displayed indifference to myths of origin however cannot be seen as evidence for a lack of common origin and history of Roma. Phinney (2001) defines an ethnic group as a “subgroup within a larger context, presuming common origins and sharing one or several of the elements: place of origin, race, kinship, culture, religion or language” (Phinney 2001, 4821). My argument is that in ethnographic terms the people I studied are distantly related ethnic groups, although Phinney’s definition cannot be followed completely in this case. For the Roma in Helsinki, the sense of kinship as people seems to be highly important, rather than the idea of having common origins. The significance of this statement lies in the fact that it advocates for the right of the studied communities to ascribe themselves *a name*. The importance and meaning of assigning “a name to things and in that name to name their being” has been described and analyzed by Foucault (Foucault 2002:132). This, however, does not imply that Roma identity is always ethnic identity. For the majority of Finnish Kale I have met, to my understanding their Roma identity is an ethnic identity, since it is based on consciousness of common origin and strong, well preserved distinctive “*Kaale kultuuri*” (Kale culture). Over the years I have also encountered many people, usually East European Roma but also some isolated from their group of Finnish Kale, for whom Roma identity has become void of meaning as ethnic identity. For them being a Roma essentially meant being a deprived person, either a member of a marginalized group or an individual alienated from their group.

The research data suggests that the perceived sameness of Roma identity does not necessarily translate into feelings of belonging, interaction or ethnic solidarity. The common factors influencing the outcome of encounters between representatives of different groups appeared to me to be: the type of social organization of the specific Roma group, the additional layers of identity (religious, professional,

political, etc.), the types of personalities involved, the prerequisites created by the specific context (likelihood of gaining or losing resources, the danger of stigma and its management, the potential presence of external threat, etc.). In that respect, identity can be also viewed as constructed in a constantly ongoing process of identification. The research material presents belonging to the Charismatic Christian movement and the presence of external threat as the most common uniting factors. The most common dividing factors appear to be differences in cultural traditions (most often in terms of expectations in social interaction), the principle of Roma groups of not interfering in each other's affairs, and for Finnish Kale, abiding to purity rules, the fear of losing resources and the reinforcement of stigma. Nevertheless, cooperation between representatives of different East European Roma groups and Finnish Kale representatives was experienced as rewarding and empowering for both parts. In the next section, I will discuss the role of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity as a triggering factor for interaction between different Roma groups.

### **Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity**

Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity appear to play a central role in the onset of interaction of Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Helsinki. Several scholars have earlier reported the restriction of close friendships to one's own group and the tendency of Roma groups not to interfere in each other's affairs. The uniting influence of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity is also a known phenomenon. The way it affects the relationship of the informants of the current study case appears to me to have two sides: a social and a spiritual one. Conversion to Pentecostalism accounts an opportunity to find a solution for many of the struggles of people in marginalized positions, such as fulfilling personal and group needs, combating deprivation and displacement, societal shift towards democratization, experimenting with new social practices and the changing role of women. For many East European Roma attending evangelizing meetings organized by Finnish Kale, the prospect of getting humanitarian help,

finding employment or assistance with all the issues a migrant faces was understandably a strong motivator. Nevertheless, I argue that social explanations are insufficient to analyze the experiences of the informants. Many of the people I worked with felt that they had been influenced by a divine agent, “*The Holy Spirit*” which gave rise to a new inner moral code, “*the new heart*”. This “*new heart*” was willing to reach out to fellow people and to accept the “social cost” associated with it as described by (Gross 2012:365). Crossing borders in turn brings new dimensions to life. Accepting Pentecostalism, characterized by Coleman as part-culture or by Robbins as universalism encountering particularity, leads to negotiations with the local cosmologies and cultural practices (Coleman 2006:3; Robbins 2010:648). Pentecostal Kale approaching East European Roma migrants with humanitarian help and evangelizing activities need to take into account the demands of their local Kale cultural practices, “*Kaale kultuuri*” as described by Roman (R. B. Roman 2017:6).

Robbins, citing Coleman (2006) and developing his argument further, presents Pentecostalism as a “part-culture” coming into “edgy contact” with other worldviews, acknowledging their existence but rejecting their values (Coleman 2006:3; Robbins 2010:648). Therefore converts find themselves in a situation where they need to deal with values of the past that they claim they have left behind. Gay y Blasco provides the example of Evangelical Gitanos, who struggled to live up to the expectations of Pentecostal preaching in rejecting feuding. Her study describes a case in which enemies forgave each other spectacularly at a public meeting but speculations concerning the sincerity of both parts flared up immediately among the respective patrigrups the following day (Gay y Blasco 1999:167-168). Similar difficulties are experienced by the community studied in the current research, who were attempting to organize spiritual meetings that members of feuding kin groups could attend.

In my understanding, Pentecostalism does reject local cosmologies but does not discard all the cultural values of a particular community. Kopsa-Schön (1996) describes how some local Kale cultural values

are approved of and retained after Pentecostal conversion. She writes about how Kale traditions of respect for elders and purity rules fit religious ideology and are envisioned as being of Biblical origin (Kopsa-Schèon 1996:260). One of the main messages of the sermons preached from Kale to East European Roma and vice versa at Pentecostal gatherings during the period of my study was that Roma do not stop being Roma when they are “born again”, but become better Roma. Preserving specific local cultural values often goes hand in hand with “cultural reinvention”, and in the case of Roma “ethnogenesis” as described by Delgado (M. C. Delgado 2010:255). Gay y Blasco shows how the notion of respect, central to the “Gitano way of being”, is appropriated, exemplifying a new standpoint towards non-Roma world and providing young Roma male converts the chance to be treated as “men of respect”, contrary to traditional conduct (Gay y Blasco 1999:170). An example among Kale would be Roma Pentecostal activists presenting the “period of ritual impurity” of young mothers, described by Viljanen, as a “period dedicated to rest”, when same-age fellow Kale women take over the kitchen work (Viljanen 2012:413).

My experience with Charismatic Christianity is that conversion may change the way a person sees and interprets almost every aspect of their life to such an extent that communication with non-converts can become challenging. As a Charismatic convert is inevitably engaged in two cultural traditions simultaneously, that brings the need to use different language – the one of the civil society and the one spoken in the religious community. Coleman shows how a convert may engage in “double talk”, meaning that his/her statements may intentionally contain double meanings, giving the example of the famous Swedish singer Carola, a professed Charismatic Christian, singing a song with a “double meaning” at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1991. Coleman argues that converts engage with two levels of reality, like the Roma who live amongst the majority population and participate simultaneously in two different cultural traditions. This study shows several examples. A casual example for Kale would be discussing the rules for respecting elders in a specific situation (for example when younger Roma cannot live in or



visit a higher floor of a building in which elder Roma inhabit or visit a lower floor) with a representative of the majority population, when other Kale would know that in addition to respect, the issue is preserving ritual purity.

My argument is that the “local Pentecostal cultural traditions and values” of Pentecostal Kale and Pentecostal East European Roma in Finland provide more common ground for interaction than their local Roma traditions. People tend to be concerned with issues common to Pentecostals in general, such as the salvation of sinners, sharing testimonies of miracles, struggles with sin in their local communities, and future plans and hopes in both spiritual and worldly aspects. Their Pentecostal God services follow similar “ritual grammars”, as described by Coleman and Hackett (Coleman and Hackett 2015:15) and explained in more detail by Robbins (Robbins 2011). At the same time, they compare local Roma customs and eventually engage in “cultural reinvention”. In the cases when one group is evangelizing the other, the idea of a universal “pan-Gypsy” Roma community is promoted, thus contributing to the transnational process of Roma “ethnogenesis”, as this term is defined by Delago (2010:255-259), implying that brotherhood solidarity duties are extended to all “*brothers in the faith*” across kin, group and nationality borders. Thus, Pentecostalism becomes a triggering factor for initiating and maintaining interaction between different Roma groups.

### **Nationality and Citizenship**

The research material suggests nationality as the third essential factor influencing the relationship of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland. The participants of the research were mainly Finnish, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma: for all these three groups, nationality is an important pillar of their identity, influencing their everyday life. For the informants I had closest contact with, mainly Bulgarian and Finnish Roma, national identity appeared to be strongly associated with the territory of their land of origin. Finnish Kale felt that their national identity as Finns was related to the fact that their ancestors

participated in the wars to preserve Finland's independence (1939-1945). Some Bulgarian Roma felt their identity to be connected with the homeland in the way characterized by Malkki (1992:27) as an arborescent manner as a plant derives its living power from the earth. The national identity of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma in Helsinki was also connected to territory – the two groups had divided between themselves the areas of the town for practicing economic activities. The Day Centre they visited frequently was similarly divided. My fieldwork observations suggest that while the degree of mobility of different Roma groups vary, their national identity is territory-based.

An interesting subject for discussion and observation during fieldwork was the interplay of national identity and transnational Roma identity of the informants. Some Finnish Kale saw the international Roma identity as posing a threat to their position as a national minority of Finland. They were concerned that association with the newcomer East European Roma migrants might spoil their image in the eyes of the majority population of the country. Finnish Kale were generally proud of and grateful for being Finns, regardless of the marginalization they also faced. In contrast, East European Roma in Finland were understandably mostly bitter about their countries of origin, since they were migrating to flee adversity. Many of the younger generation of East European Roma migrants wanted to see themselves and their families as part of Finnish society. In contrast, the “political focus and centre of identity” of the older generation appeared to be strongly connected with their land of origin, as indicated by Glick Schiller (2005:571) and Anderson (1998). Even after years of permanent settlement in Finland, they continued to follow the political and societal development “back home” as well as providing financial and moral support.

Differing citizenship was a source of profound inequality in the relationship between Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Finland. While the Finnish Kale enjoy the generous social support of a Nordic welfare state, many of their East European friends have been forced to flee their homes in a struggle for

survival. During my fieldwork, the majority of East European Roma informants visiting Finland for the warm season dwelt in the streets without permanent shelter. Some of them also spend winter on the streets of Helsinki. Many Finnish Kale, mostly but not only the ones belonging to Charismatic Christian congregations, helped them with lodging, searching for employment and managing the paperwork connected to migration. Some Finnish Kale NGOs and private persons advocated for East European Roma at the political and societal level.

The current study provides an example of how people negotiate their association with different nations and locations flexibly, depending on changing circumstances in the course of their lifespan. Roma identity is by definition not territory-based. Over the course of history, the Roma had also not established a territory-based nation. At present some Roma groups appear to be as sedentary as the surrounding population, whereas others practise a semi-sedentary way of life. Regardless of the degree of mobility, however, the participants of my research clearly associate themselves with different locations and territory-based nations.

### **1.3 Previous Research on Roma in Finland and on Roma Interaction**

A theoretical starting point for this research has been the existing Finnish and international research literature on Roma identity (Marushiakova 1992; Kopsa-Schèon 1996; Åberg 1998; Hancock 2002; Dufva and others 2002; K. Granqvist and Viljanen 2002; Marsh and Strand 2006; Marsh 2007; Kyuchukov and Hancock 2010; Rantala and Huttunen 1993; Viljanen 1974; Mayall 2004). The comparison of the identity and concepts of “*romanipe*” (“romaniness”) of different Roma groups has received little attention in research literature. The focus of attention of the international Roma identity research has mostly been on comparing the position of the Roma population with that of the majority population. The main issues have been the research on Roma with regard to education and measures taken by authorities.

Research on Roma has a long history. The first formal international association of scholars studying Gypsy, Travelers, and analogous peripatetic groups, “The Gypsy Lore Society”, was founded in Great Britain in 1888. One of its first presidents (1911-1912) was Arthur Thesleff, a Finnish Roma language scholar who had not finished his academic education. The study of Gypsies at the time was inspired by the general interest in the study of folklore and the establishment of the Folk Lore Society in 1878. The revival of the Romantic Movement was connected with the folklore movements and strongly engaged with nature and freedom. The Gypsy Lorists referred to the lifestyle of the groups they studied in a romanticizing manner, seeing it as “a romantic symbol in a modern (Victorian) age” (Mayall 2004:157-158). Academic research on Roma was initiated in the 1970s: Viljanen (1974) studied Finnish Kale by applying the symbols theory of Mary Douglas, Sutherland (1975) analyzed the boundary maintenance practices of at the time unknown American Rom group, Miller (1998 [1975]) discussed the ideology of defilement among Machvaia Roma in America, and Okely (1983) published the first social anthropological monograph on Gypsies in Britain. Following the tradition of classic anthropology, each of these studies concentrated on a single group.

The first scholarly work on Finnish Kale was published by Ganander, Kristfrid in 1779: *”Undersökning om De så kallade Zigeunare (Cingari, Bohemiens), hvadan de härstamma samt om, när och varest några satt sig ner i Sverige? (Study of the so-called Gypsies (Cingari, Bohemians), their origin as well as when and where they settled in Sweden.)*<sup>6</sup> It is an ethnological description of itinerant Kale from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pulma 2006, 40-41). The PhD theses on Roma in Finland are predominantly ethnographic descriptions of Roma culture or works discussing the position of Roma as citizens. The ethnographic doctoral studies describe Roma culture from different perspectives (traditions Markkanen (2003); music Åberg (2002) and Blomster (2004)). Doctoral studies on the position of Roma as citizens deal with the

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<sup>6</sup> At the time, Finland, where Ganander lived, was the eastern part of the Swedish empire.

exclusion and marginalization of Roma from different areas of society (forensic psychiatric statements Viljanen (1994) , police Grönfors (1979), acculturation Vehmas (1961), business world Anttonen (2009)) or the overall status of Roma in society( Nordberg (2007)). In addition, research has been done on Roma history, societal issues and religion (among others Pulma (2006; 2012); Tervonen (2010); Viljanen, Hagert & Blomerus (2007); Majaniemi & Viljanen (2008); Thurfjell (2013), Roman (2017)). From 1970 onwards master's theses on Roma have appeared in the fields of pedagogics, education, culture and social sciences. The first study analyzing Kale culture in Finland is a master's thesis by Anna Maria Viljanen (1974), "*Mary Douglasin symboliteorian sovellus Suomen mustalaisilta kerättyyn perinteeseen*" ("*Application of the symbols theory of Mary Douglas to the traditions collected from Finnish Gypsies*") Research on Romani language in Finland has been performed for more than 200 years, but really sprang from the work of Arthur Thesleff (1901). In the beginning the focus was on gathering data: the first wordlists and dictionaries date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1990s a point of interest has been lexicography and data-gathering. At the turn of 2000, the central themes were phonetics, phonology and morphosyntax (among others Valtonen (1972); Koivisto (1994); Granqvist and Hedman (2003); Pirttisaari (2003); Granqvist (2002; 2006; 2007)). The sociology and sociolinguistics of the language are recent directions in contemporary research on Romani language (K. Granqvist 2010).

Until recently the research on Roma in Finland has concentrated on investigating Finnish Kale. In Anna Maria Viljanen-Saira's (1979) unpublished licentiate thesis *Mustalaiskulttuuri ja kulttuurin muutos* there is only a brief mention of the attitude of Finnish and Swedish Roma towards each other's cultures. That is presumably due to Finnish Kale not having been in permanent contact with other Roma groups at the time. In the 1970s, many Finnish Roma moved to Sweden, where they got to know Kalderash Roma living in Sweden. In the 1960s and 1970s, a renowned Swedish Kaldersh Roma activist, Katarina Taikon, visited Finland with the aim of supporting the improvement of the societal position of Finnish Roma.

Only after Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007 did greater numbers of foreign Roma enter Finland. In her master's thesis, R.B. Roman (2014) describes the attitudes of the Finnish Roma elite towards East European Roma migrants in Finland in terms of ethnic solidarity. A part of her PhD thesis discusses the missionary outreach of Finnish Kale to Roma in Romania (R. B. Roman 2017). Tervonen and Enache (2017) address the bordering policies of Helsinki municipality towards the newcomer Roma migrants.

While there are several studies on specific Roma groups, international research literature also does not offer much insight into the interaction between different Roma groups. Ignacy-Marek Kaminski's (1987) article *The dilemma of power: internal and external leadership* provides a description of different Roma groups living in Poland: *Polska Roma*, *Bergitka Roma*, *Kalderasha* and *Lovara*. Kaminski analyzes their internal hierarchical organization as well as the power relationships between different Roma groups and between the Roma groups and the majority population (Kaminski 1987). Another study addressing the subject is an article by Matt Salo (1979) on the implications of native categories and interaction for the ethnic classification of three North American Gypsy groups: the *Rom*, *Romnicel* and *Ludar*. A few more recent studies have touched upon communication between different Roma groups. Marushiakova and Popov (1997) suggest that well-preserved Roma groups prefer to maintain close friendships only inside their own group, as well as to refrain from interfering in the affairs of other Roma groups. Marushiakova (1992) and Solimene (2011:648) suggests that in times of trouble, Roma support each other across group boundaries. Similar issues are addressed in my study on the interaction of Finnish Roma inmates with Foreign Roma inmates in prisons in Finland (Gripenberg in print). Solimene (2011) describes in an article the complex relationship of Bosnian Xoraxane' Roma settled in Roma with the newcomer Romanian Roma, who entered the city after 2007. Studies from the beginning of the century have portrayed how Roma NGOs and local Pentecostal congregations attempt to build unity between

different Roma groups (M. Delgado 2010; P. Blasco 2002). Several authors have discussed how Roma identity used as a tool for ethnic mobilization on the political level (Vermeersch 2006; McGarry 2008; Marushiakova 2008; Marushiakova and Popov 2004). Overall, this thesis appears to be the first extensive anthropological study on the ordinary day-to-day interaction of different Roma groups.

#### **1.4 Research Process and Ethical Considerations**

“Doing research is always a journey”, said my highly respected teacher and supervisor PhD Minna Valtonen at Diaconia University of Applied Science to me at the turn of 2009-2010, when I was initiating the research for my final thesis. “You can’t know for sure where it will end up”. That was valuable advice for someone used to the relatively structured and predictable environment of engineering. Those words carried me not only through the final thesis for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences and Deacon in the Lutheran church but also through my PhD studies in anthropology. As with any PhD project, this one had its own challenges. One major challenge was ensuring that I had sufficient formal research data. Doing anthropological research on a specific community of people by joining them and living with a family belonging to that community is probably the most common form of anthropological research. In the case of my research that was not possible; I was to investigate the relationship of different Roma groups in a town which was my home town. Eventually friends of friends and acquaintances of acquaintances helped me to find places and occasions where Roma interaction took place. I tried to be helpful to the participants in the research by providing interpretation and handling paperwork for newcomer East European Roma. Research in anthropology is greatly dependent on the personality of the researcher. Another colleague would have probably got involved with different people and highlighted other aspects of the relationship of Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Helsinki.

An important part of the learning process was my cooperation with supervisors. My first supervisor in anthropology was Docent Anna Maria Viljanen, who is an expert in social and cultural anthropology

concerning Finnish Kale. After a year of cooperation however, I realized that, as Anna Maria had recently retired, I would need another supervisor who would be actively following the latest trends in general anthropology. I turned for help to the head of the Anthropology department at the time, Professor Sarah Green, who kindly agreed to become my supervisor as well. Having two supervisors in anthropology was a privilege and a challenge at the same time. At times they would disagree on some key issues, which trained me to search and find my own standpoint and rely less on the expertise of others. If I could do this work again from the beginning, I would probably take more courses in general anthropology before applying for doctoral studies. That would have helped me to choose and direct the focus of my study more precisely at an earlier stage.

Starting April 2014, I proceeded with my formal research plan. For about a year, I studied anthropology and concentrated on research literature concerning Roma ethnic identity. From the late spring of 2014, I started visiting the Hirundo Day Centre, where most of the visiting East European Roma without permanent addresses gathered on a regular basis. About the same time, Ivan, in cooperation with Finnish Roma activist Angelica, decided to contact the National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF) with the idea of starting evangelizing meetings for newly arrived East European Roma. The executive director of the NRFF, Armas Lindberg, was interested in organizing such events, and he gathered a group of prominent Finnish Roma evangelists to discuss the subject. As a result, NRFF started evangelizing meetings in the premises of the “Green Oasis” (Vihreä Keidäs) association, near the Hirundo Day Centre. During these meetings, a Bulgarian Roma couple were converted and together with other Bulgarian Roma who were already Pentecostals, became interested in attending Pentecostal churches and gatherings where they could meet Finnish Roma. At the beginning of 2015, Ivan started a work trial through the unemployment office at the NRFF and Angelica went through a training period at Hirundo Day Centre. The most active part of my fieldwork was conducted during the period of Sept 2014 to Sept 2015. The period Aug 2015



– Sept 2015 was mostly devoted to interviews. The main fieldwork sites were the National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF), a country organization of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), Helsinki Deaconess Institute Day Centres Hirundo and Kaalo, Pentecostal Gatherings organized by NRFF for East European Roma in Helsinki, Finnish Roma Pentecostal Gatherings and private gatherings.

In conducting this research, I have taken into consideration the general ethical principles typical for research on living persons (Siikala 2015). The Ethical Committee of Helsinki Deaconess Institute (Appendix 1) granted permission to conduct the research. I created leaflets to inform the community about the goals and methods of the research (Appendix 2). Explaining the goals and necessity of the research to the participants often proved to be a challenge. A special ethical consideration was the fact that most of the itinerant Roma visitors in Finland were driven by poverty, sometimes even extreme poverty. In Finland they were homeless and constantly shooed away by security guards or police. Under these circumstances, asking abstract questions about Roma traditions or their perceptions concerning other Roma groups was often inappropriate. I carefully considered preserving the anonymity of informants. The groups are small and even a few details from the life story of an informant may reveal their identity. Another challenge was that some of the informants insisted on being present in the research with their own names. I have respected their choice and have mentioned them with their own names. All pseudonyms are marked as pseudonyms. One particularly troubling ethical concern was what I call “the hidden tears” of the community. Informants repeatedly talked to me about issues of the community that bothered them or brought them a lot of sorrow. Usually but not always, this was accompanied by the phrase: “But you won’t tell or write about that, will you?” In some cases, other informants specifically asked me to make some of those delicate issues public. I have chosen to address some sensitive issues as gently as possible, aiming not to bring harm to the communities I write about. At the same time, I consider

discussing sensitive issues important both for the development of the community but also for fostering understanding and trust among others.

Another ethical consideration is connected to doing research among Pentecostals, while myself being from a Pentecostal background. I see this setting to be more of an intellectual challenge than an ethical one. The reason is that I am not aware of any sensitive issues concerning Pentecostalism that need to be kept from publicity in order to protect vulnerable communities or individuals. The privacy of individuals is certainly an issue to be respected and taken into consideration in all settings. Apart from that, Pentecostal communities and practices have their challenges and controversies, just like any other community and its practices. Addressing and discussing these issues in a scholarly debate may be unpleasant, but in the long term is most probably beneficial.

I see working among Pentecostals as an intellectual challenge, because research calls for analytical and rational description of phenomena, which for a member of a congregation are supposed to be “taken on faith” and analysed with spiritual senses and abilities. Combining these approaches is challenging and not always possible. Being in a double role of a researcher and a congregation member poses a challenge to me and to the immediate circle of people I interact with. On the other hand, I see doing research on issues connected with Pentecostalism as useful, as it gives me “permission” to theorise and elaborate on matters that a Pentecostal believer is expected to accept on faith.

## **1.5 Participant Observation Sites**

In this section, I briefly describe the places where fieldwork took place, as well as the key informants. For research ethics reasons I have concealed the identities of several of the informants. As a consequence, the whereabouts and time of many of the events is stated only approximately. More exact data can be found in the fieldwork diary. Since Roma have been marginalized and persecuted for centuries, most of

them are understandably very sensitive to researchers, journalists and other such figures, especially when pictures are taken. In order to keep the atmosphere as relaxed and natural as possible, I only occasionally took pictures with my smartphone, usually when group pictures were being taken by other participants of the events.

### **The National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF)**

The National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF) is the Finnish branch of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF). It is an umbrella organization for about 15 (at the time of this research) active Roma NGOs. Finland's representative and deputy representative for the ERTF Assembly are chosen from the candidates of the member organizations for four years at a time. The purpose of the NRFF is to promote and observe the fulfilment of the basic and civil rights of Roma population in Finland, combating all forms of racism and discrimination.



**Figure 2** Angelica's Graduation party at NRFF 12.12.2015 (Picture by courtesy of NRFF)

NRFF advocates for Roma culture and Roma language, pluralism, intercultural dialogue, social integration and the social and political empowerment of Roma. It has a central role in improving the societal participation and networking potential of Roma organizations (The National Roma Forum of Finland 2018). During the time of my fieldwork its executive director was Armas Lindberg and its network coordinator his wife, Sanna Lindberg. Until the end of 2014 the office of NRFF was situated in Vallila in Helsinki; it moved to Pasila in the spring of 2015.

A substantial part of my fieldwork was performed during events and meetings organized by the NRFF. In the autumn of 2014, the NRFF initiated a series of evangelizing events for the East European Roma in Helsinki, most of whom were visitors at the Helsinki Deaconess Institute's Hirundo Day Centre. I acted as an interpreter in those meetings.

### **Finnish Roma Bible Study and Prayer Group**

During the autumn and winter of 2014 and spring of 2015, some Finnish Roma, mostly elderly, gathered for weekly Bible study and prayer. The meetings were organized in the "club room" of a blockhouse in one of the suburbs of Helsinki. About 10 Finnish Roma men and 3-4 Finnish Roma women were usually present. A few Bulgarian Roma joined these meetings and I acted as an interpreter. Ivan, an elderly Bulgarian Roma Pentecostal pastor and one of the key informants of this research, was invited to preach at some of the gatherings.

### **NRFF Christian Meetings at Vihreä Keidas**

Vihreä Keidas, which translates into English as Green Oasis, is a Christian organization that has functioned in Helsinki since 1966. Its goal is to support people suffering from alcohol and drug addiction in their efforts to achieve a healthy and addiction-free lifestyle. As Green Oasis was then conveniently situated just one block away from the Hirundo Day Centre, in the autumn of 2014 the executive director

of NRFF Armas Lindberg made an agreement with Green Oasis to rent their premises weekly for the purpose of organizing the Christian meetings for East European Roma.



Map 1 Map showing the locations of the NRFF, Green Oasis and Hirundo  
(Courtesy of NRFF) A) Green Oasis B) Hirundo C) National Roma Forum of Finland



Figure 3 Meeting at Green Oasis, Spring 2015 (Photo Lidia Gripenberg)

### **Roma Youth Club Gathering**

A Finnish Roma Youth Club in the Helsinki metropolitan area organized gatherings for Finnish Roma. On a couple of occasions, I visited the club together with a few young Bulgarian Roma. In one of the cases a young Bulgarian pastor and his wife were invited to preach. I participated as an interpreter.

### **Roma Days in East-Helsinki**

Life and Light (an international Roma Mission) and NRFF organized Roma Days for Finnish Roma, to which they also invited Bulgarian and Romanian Roma. The events took place at a Youth Centre in East Helsinki. I served as an interpreter both for the sermons and for informal conversations.



**Figure 4 Roma Day in Eastern Helsinki in December 2014.**  
Preacher Ivan, interpreter Lidia. (Courtesy of NRFF)





Figure 5 Invitation to Roma Day organized by NRFF and Life and Light December 2014

### Roma Pentecostal Meetings

During my fieldwork, several Roma Pentecostal gatherings were organized in different parts of the metropolitan area. Most of them were organized by Finnish Roma but some also by Romanian Roma, who held their own meetings at two locations in the metropolitan area. I also translated at these meetings, mostly for Bulgarian Roma but on some occasions also for Finnish Roma.

## Gatherings at Private Homes and Outdoors

I had the chance to attend several gatherings at private homes and in public spaces. Those were mostly family visits and celebrations.



**Figure 6** Remus and Henry Hedman at Remus' home in Riihimäki, Autumn 2015  
(Photo Lidia Gripenberg)



**Figure 7** Birthday party of Bulgarian Roma at Kalasatama in the summer of 2015  
(Courtesy of the hosts)



## **Day Centres Hirundo & Kaalo**

At the time of my fieldwork, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute was running two separate “low threshold”<sup>7</sup> Day Centres: the Hirundo Day Centre for EU itinerant population, mostly visited by East European Roma, and the Kaalo Day Centre for Finnish Roma. The Kaalo Day Centre mainly served Finnish Roma living on the margins of the dominant social community and often on the margins of the Roma community as well. It offered a place to gather around a cup of coffee and the daily newspaper, as well as access to the internet and culture-sensitive assistance with acquiring social services. I had previously worked as an instructor at the Kaalo Day Centre for a bit more than one and a half years (2011-2013).



**Figure 8 Day Centre Kaalo invited East European Roma, May 2014**  
(Courtesy of Day Centre Kaalo)

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<sup>7</sup> “Low threshold” Day Centre is a place, which anyone can visit.



**Figure 9 Christmas party at Day Centre Hirundo December 2014**

(Courtesy of Day Centre Hirundo)

The Hirundo Day Centre offered its customers the opportunity to shower, wash their clothes, rest, warm up and consume their own food, gain access to the internet as well as to receive assistance among others with access to social and healthcare services. During my fieldwork, several Finnish Roma volunteered with humanitarian aid, bringing food and clothes to the Day Centre. A few Finnish Roma worked there as employees or trainees in connection with educational programmes. I followed two Finnish Roma women closely, one of whom was an employee and one a trainee, and assisted them with translation. I also participated in several events for East European Roma organized by or in cooperation with Finnish Roma.

The Helsinki Deaconess Institute is a foundation founded in 1867 based on Christian values, and its history is closely connected to the Lutheran church (Helsinki Deaconess Institute 2017) . At present, however, the place of Christian teaching and values in the daily life of a particular section of the organization largely depends on the local management, the employees as well as the customers. During

the time of my fieldwork Christian teaching was not a part of the events of Hirundo Day Centre, except for some activities organized by NRFF in their premises. Even the presence of a Bible in the “living room” of Hirundo was seen as inappropriate. In contrast, Christianity was an essential part of the activities at Kaalo Day Centre: the idea was supported by the staff and insisted upon by several of the customers.

### **Shopping Centre “Ostari” in the Metropolitan**

As I learned during the research, areas in the Centre of Helsinki are divided between different East European Roma Groups for the purposes of begging and selling newspapers. The Ostari Shopping Centre was mostly surrounded by Bulgarian Roma. I assisted a Finnish Roma couple with preaching the Gospel to Bulgarian Roma gathered at Ostari. I also spent an evening with a Bulgarian Roma couple at the shopping centre and the surroundings, participating in their daily work, gathering cans and bottles from the garbage bins and returning them to the local shops in exchange for a deposit. On one occasion, by the request of the Bulgarian Roma, I organized a meeting with the head of the security guards at Ostari in order to present some complaints that the Bulgarian Roma had and negotiate for a better relationship between the Roma and the guards.

## **1.6 Key People**

The purpose of this section is to briefly introduce the main participants in my research in order to facilitate reading different parts of the ethnographic description in more random order.

### **Ivan**

Ivan Hristov was the first Bulgarian Roma man I got to know closely. In 1995 he hosted part of the Finnish Roma missionary group, for which I was acting as an interpreter, at his home in the village of Korten. During the communist period Ivan had been employed at the local state-owned farm (Tekezece)

but the change of regime brought unemployment, poverty and insecurity to everyone in the country and even more so to the Roma. Since we met, Ivan's desire had been to emigrate to the West and find a better life for his family. His dream was eventually fulfilled in 2008, when he and his wife Dimirinka were employed by the cleaning company serving the office where I worked at the time. Ivan and Dimirinka moved to Helsinki, where three of their four adult children followed them with their families within a few years. Ivan and his brother Vasil had established a Roma Pentecostal church in the yard of their house in Korten. They had transformed the garage into a church. Ivan was the first pastor of that church, which was attended by Roma from different groups in the region as well as some Bulgarians. At present (2018) the church is pastored by Ivan's oldest son Nasko. Ivan has a passion for evangelizing among Roma but also among all other people. He is strongly interested in building bridges between Roma groups and the majority population. During his stay in Finland he actively sought contact with Finnish Roma. His greatest strength seems to be the ability to forgive and be merciful and show goodwill towards people who have hurt him. During my fieldwork Ivan was unemployed, searching for permanent employment. He eventually managed to get a half-year contract with the town of Helsinki (tukityö) and a 6-month traineeship period at NRFF and later on found regular employment. During my fieldwork Ivan was in his late 50s.

### **Angelica**

Angelica Vironen is a Finnish Roma woman, in her early thirties at the time of this study. She was known to her community as a very courageous woman, with a strong zeal to bring the Gospel to all people. Poor and marginalized Roma seemed to have a special place in Angelica's heart. I first became acquainted with her in the summer of 2013 at the Pentecostal Church in Myyrmäki, where she and her friend Ramona (pseudonym, also Finnish Roma) were organizing evangelical meetings, accompanied by coffee and pastry, for the East European Roma dwelling on the streets of Helsinki. They invited Ivan to these

meetings to preach to the East European Roma in Roma language. As we got to know each other, Angelica and Ivan started to plan evangelizing activities together. It was Angelica's idea to approach NRFF with the initiative to set up regular meetings for East European Roma.



**Figure 10 With Angelica and Ivan at Maailma Kylässä Festival 23.5.2015**

**From left – Ivan, Lidia, Angelica (Photo visitor to the festival)**

During my fieldwork, Angelica obtained a contract for competence-based qualification for a “Romani Culture Instructor Further Vocational Qualification” (Romanikulttuurin ohjaajan ammattitutkinto) at The Church Training College in Järvenpää. The competence-based qualification was conducted mostly through practice at her workplace, NRFF and partially through studies at the College. One part of the curriculum was named “Functioning in a Multicultural Environment.” Angelica completed the practical implementation of this section by working at Hirundo every Monday as well as by helping organize the Christian Meetings that NRFF was holding for foreign Roma at Green Oasis. I was appointed as one of the assessors for that study unit.

### **Jussi and Mirjami**

Jussi and Mirjami are a Finnish Roma couple in their late thirties. They spent more than 10 years of their life in Sweden and moved to Finland in 2013. Just about then, they also started visiting my home church in Leppävaara. Jussi and Mirjami are enthusiastic evangelicals who had been very active in their home church in Sweden, Eskilstuna. With their immigration to Finland they undertook a one-year full-time Bible course at The Finnish Bible Institute. In addition, the family experienced a calling to supply food for needy people. A few days every week, they would fetch food that was about to expire but was still edible from stores and distribute it to different addresses. I told Jussi and Mirjami that I had just started working on a project dealing with the interaction of Finnish Roma with East European Roma. As soon as the meetings that NRFF organized for East European Roma commenced, I invited Mirjami to join. After some time, both Jussi and Mirjami joined this initiative. Jussi often preached and testified, and Mirjami prepared food for the meetings. They also started to supply food to Hirundo Day Centre a couple of times per week. All of this was a considerable financial burden, since the family was surviving on unemployment benefits. Even covering the travelling costs from their home to Sörnäinen, where Hirundo and Green Oasis were situated at the time (about 13km each way), was challenging enough.

### **Radostin and Milena**

Radostin and Milena (pseudonyms) are a Bulgarian Roma couple who arrived in Helsinki in the summer of 2014. They had earlier lived in Central Europe, where they first met. Their trip to Finland was motivated by personal reasons. The family of the young woman had not approved of their relationship and the couple was searching for a new place to settle. This was Radostin's second relationship: he had left his first family behind with two school-aged children. At the time we met, Radostin and Milena had

no permanent address and were making their living by selling Iso Numero<sup>8</sup> magazines and gathering cans. I was truly impressed by the earnestness they showed in their work, enabling them to send money to their family members abroad regularly. Their home was an empty shed they had found by chance while strolling about town. The shed was situated in the centre of Helsinki, close to Kalasatama; it was the type used for accommodating construction site workers or offices and had an electricity supply. As they had no sanitary facilities, the couple were frequent visitors to Hirundo Day Centre, where we met in the autumn of 2014. Radostin and Milena regularly attended the NRFF's meetings for East European Roma. In time they became active organizers, taking the responsibility for preparing the warm meals on some occasions. In addition to the Green Oasis events, we participated together in several Finnish Roma Pentecostal gatherings.

Looking back at the places where I conducted fieldwork, it is significant that most of the official organizations who provided participant observation sites were connected to Christianity. Some of them were explicitly religious organizations, like the Pentecostal churches. Others, like the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, which defines itself as a "foundation working boldly to uphold human dignity, providing help to people at risk of social exclusion" (Helsinki Deaconess Institute 2018) have their historical roots in Christianity, but in their daily activities Christian practices may or may not be present or may even be actively avoided. There were also organizations like the NRFF or youth clubs, which were secular by definition but whose employees were engaged in Christian teaching and did organize religious events. I did not intentionally choose observation sites connected with Christianity or Pentecostalism. Since most of the Roma I knew before the onset of the research were from Pentecostal circles, it was a natural choice that part of the fieldwork would be implemented there. Christian organizations also played a provisional

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<sup>8</sup> Iso Numero (The Big Number) is a magazine sold on the streets, which offers poor people the opportunity to improve their income. The seller keeps half of the magazine's price.

role in the lives of many of the participants of the study by fulfilling spiritual needs but also by meeting material and social necessities. For East European Roma, this was mostly in form of humanitarian help and the opportunity to establish contacts with Finnish Kale. For Finnish Kale, involvement with Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity mostly provided better opportunities to be in contact with and cooperate with the majority population.

However, I intentionally avoided limiting my observations only to Christian and Pentecostal circles. In the Day Centres ran by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, most of the people I met were not actively involved with Christianity. I also conducted a few group interviews in penal institutions close to the metropolitan area, as I had learned that Finnish Kale tend to be readily in contact with East European Roma in these settings. I have used only a small amount of research data from the interview in this thesis but I have written a separate article on it. Even though building connections and trust with new participants was a slow and complicated process, it was an important part of the study. It enabled me to deal with the incorrect starting assumption that most Finnish Kale and East European Roma in general are interested in interacting with each other.

I will now proceed to discussing the major factors influencing the interaction of Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Helsinki.



## 2. Gypsy Heart and Gypsy Blood

Throughout my fieldwork, representatives of both Finnish and East European Roma kept referring to Roma or Gypsy blood or heart when they wanted to affirm commonality between different Roma Groups or their belonging to a transnational Roma/Gypsies community. Whether they used Gypsy or Roma usually depended on the setting. The more official the occasion, the more commonly the term Roma was used. Among close friends or good acquaintances Gypsy (“*mustalainen*”, “*циганин*”) was clearly preferred, and regarded as a sign that the interlocutors were considered to be in the circle of “their own”.

*“My heart is a Gypsy heart. I want to help my own people and cooperate with Finnish Gypsies, we are one nation.”* Bulgarian Roma man visiting Finnish Roma activists Diary 20.5.2014

*“It’s our blood, we all have the same Roma blood. In the Finnish Roma veins it pulsates a bit slower than in Bulgarians and Romanians, but it’s the same.”* Finnish Roma man speaking at a Pentecostal meeting organized for East European Roma Diary 5.11.2014

My goal in this part of my work is based on my fieldwork experiences as well as interviews to describe and analyze what this sense of belonging and expression of common identity was based on, as seen by the participants of the research and as understood by scholars working in the field. In the process of preparing for fieldwork, to gain an overall perspective, I made a rough review of the scientific literature on Roma Identity over the last 50 years in the field of Romani Studies, which includes several disciplines. For the purposes of the theoretical analysis offered in this work, I will concentrate mainly on literature in the fields of social and cultural anthropology and ethnology.

Reviewing the research on Roma Identity in *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000 From Egyptians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany*, Mayall (2004) describes the development of particular trends of scholarship in

terms of their strengths and weaknesses. The ‘primordial’ (Mayall’s word) definition of ethnicity was prevalent until the 1950s and 1960s, then the situationalist/circumstantialist (also called instrumentalist) approach evolved in the late 1960s and 1970s, followed by the more recent constructionist school. The primordial (ontological) approach argues that ethnicity is an ontological category (it simply exists as an empirical reality) and it thus focuses on what this approach regards as fundamental and natural attachments, such as kin connections, common ways of life and language, and endogamy. These are briefly defined as “blood, speech and culture”, which specify ethnic identity as given at birth (blood) and then taught from an early age (speech and culture). Characteristic of this ontological approach is the emphasis on the emotional ties and loyalty that people experience towards the ethnic group into which they are born. The shift to a more situationalist/ circumstantialist perspective, triggered by Barth’s 1969 publication *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, turned attention towards a group’s formation and boundary-making process on the bases of self-interests and needs. Ethnic identity and group boundaries were presented as variable and fluid, subject to changes in external circumstances. The emergence of interdisciplinary studies on the subject in the 1980s led to the formulation of the constructionist view, an attempt to combine the previous two approaches. The key argument of the constructionist perspective is that ethnicity is constantly recreated and remodelled as a response to external conditions, while its base persists. The base is seen to be provided by the ontological components of ethnicity, such as claims to common geographical origin and history, shared memories and models of behaviour, plus possible experiences of discrimination (Mayall 2004, 193-195).

In the *Annual Review of Anthropology* article *Roma and Gypsy “Ethnicity” as a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry* Stewart (2013) identifies three major streams of anthropological research on Roma and Gypsy populations over the last 40 years. Scholars have offered three major explanations for Roma communities not blending in with non-Roma groups for centuries in the midst of culturally

different and often hostile populations. Studies favouring historical explanations focus on the origins of Roma and treat them as an unassimilated ethnic group. Studies offering structural explanations offer the alternative view that Gypsy communities occupy specific niches in the changing division of labour, as well as on the effect of labelling by institutions in power. The third main stream of research offers a culturalist argument, pointing to the internal coherence of the Roma value system (M. Stewart 2013, 418). Similar trends appear in the research literature on Roma Identity over the last 50 years. Few studies provide an ontological view of Roma culture and identity, which is unsurprising given that the idea of the prior ontological existence of identity in general has been discredited as an approach in recent decades. Many studies take the constructionist approach to the subject, following the idea of a boundary-making process generating and maintaining ethnic diversity, introduced by (Barth 1969, 18). The third group of studies, identified by Stewart as offering cultural explanations, was also recognizable. These usually stressed the performative nature of Roma Identity. I was able to identify two more groups of studies: those questioning the notion of Roma Ethnicity and those focusing on a Roma ethnic identity from the perspective of Ethnic Mobilization.

Several studies view Roma as descendants of Ancient Indian ethnic groups (Fraser 1995; Matras 2004; Le Bas 2010; Liegeois 1987; Sutherland 1975). One of the well-known studies presenting Roma as people living in diaspora is Fraser's work *The Gypsies*, which refers to several linguistic and historical sources to justify the claim of Indian origin of European Roma. Fraser (1995) concludes that the goal of European Roma in modern times is to reunite and to bridge the differences in language and culture caused by long-term contact with other European populations. Changes in Roma cultural traditions over time are explained by a border-maintaining process aiming at preserving the minority's autonomy (Fraser 1995, 319).

Recent development in genetics has provided new opportunities to explore the biological heredity factors affecting Romani ethnic identity. Iovita & Schurr (2004) assert that molecular genetic studies concerning European Roma unequivocally confirm the linguistic theory of an Indian or South Asian origin for Gypsies. Historical data for the three latest largest migration waves of Roma to Europe are also supported by these genetic findings. This suggests that other peripatetic groups joining the Gypsy population for socio-economic reasons or based on common experiences of labelling and marginalisation (as suggested by Okely (1983) and Lucassen, Willems, & Cottaar (1998)) would have occurred on rather limited bases (Iovita 2004, 279).

Many studies view Roma ethnicity from a constructionist perspective. (W. Willems 1997; Okely 2011; Okely 1983; Belton 2005; Csepeli and Simon 2004; Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar 1998) Several European and American researchers define Gypsies as communities occupying a specific socioeconomic niche called the peripatetics' niche, satisfying "the regular demands for specialized goods and/or services that more sedentary or pastoral communities cannot, or will not support on permanent basis". The term "peripatetic"<sup>9</sup> was chosen as semantically neutral and was derived from the Sanscrit *pāryātān*, used for systematic, planned mobility. Previously, other terms had been suggested such as *service nomads* (Hayden 1979, 297), *non-food-producing nomads* (Rao 1982, 115), etc. (Berland and Salo 1986, 2) Several studies portray Roma as nomads exploiting a specific ecological niche (Salo 1987; G. Gmelch and Gmelch 1987; Kaminski 1987; Piasere 1987; Liegeois 1987; Berland and Rao 2004; Okely 1983) While the notion of peripatetic adaptation and peripatetic niche is claimed to be well-established (Salo 2005, 189), attention should be paid to the fact that using nomadism as the defining criterion for Roma groups is misleading. It is known that several Gypsy groups, for example in East Europe and Spain, have

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<sup>9</sup> (member) of the school of philosophy founded by Aristotle, who taught in a peripatos or walking place in the Lyceum at Athens. XVI. — (O)F. péripatétique or L. peripatēticus — Gr. peripatētikós, f. peripateîn walk up and down (Anonymous 1996)

been sedentary for hundreds of years, while nomadism is employed by groups of varied social organization (S. B. Gmelch 1986, 309).

A classic in European Romani studies is Judith Okely's monograph (1983) *The Traveller-Gypsies*. While acknowledging the hereditary component of kin connection in the principle of descent, Okely approaches the issue of British Travellers' ethnic identity from the constructionist point of view. The hypothesis of Roma being connected by the choice to occupy a special economic niche as commercial and service nomads is clearly predominant in the study. Okely presents additional hypotheses to explain why several Roma groups use dialects of a common Sanskrit related language, Romany. (Okely 1983, 8-14) The pollution beliefs characteristic of several Roma groups are viewed as a tool in a border-building process towards the non-Gypsy world (Okely 1983, 103-104).

The performativity of Roma Identity was a subject of investigation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gay y Blasco 1999; Slavkova 2007; M. Stewart 1997; Theodosiou 2010, 327), along with questioning the notion of Roma ethnicity (Gay y Blasco 1999; M. Stewart 1997; M. Stewart 2011; Dust 2011). According to Stewart (2011, 2), the Roma community lacks clearly defined boundaries and specific features, in contrast with people groups gathered by nation-state categories and their institutions. For that reason Romany communities are easily seen as anomalies in the light of "culture", "ethnic group" or "people" concepts developed under the conditions of nation states. (M. Stewart 2011, 2).

The literature review from different fields of Romani Studies made me realize that different themes and vantage points have been prevalent in research literature during different periods. In the field I also came to see that some of those theoretical approaches are useful for analyzing my data.

The Roma identity and religious identity of the participants in this study are deeply intertwined, largely because the starting point of the study was among Roma who were Pentecostal. That, however, is not the only reason. Belief in God, who is righteous and protects Roma, appears to be characteristic for the

people I got to know over the years, regardless of their religious affiliation. In this section Roma identity is singled out for analytical reasons. The terms Roma identity and Gypsy identity are assumed to be interchangeable for the purpose of simplification, even though, in fieldwork settings, in some cases they may not be.

Spending time with the participants of my research, I gradually noticed how Roma Identity was expressed and recreated in the daily life of the participants, both from their own actions as well as from the actions of the surrounding population. In the case of the Finnish Kale who are central to this research, Roma Identity is most visibly expressed by the way it is performed in everyday situations. In the next section I will discuss how Roma identity was expressed and performed in interaction of different Roma groups in Helsinki.

## **2.1 Expressed and Performed Roma Identity**

In addition to Finnish Kale, expressing and performing of Roma Identity was most visible for the groups who wear group-specific clothing, like some of the Romanian Roma groups residing in or visiting Helsinki. The picture on the following page depicts Romanian Roma attending an evangelizing event organized by Finnish Kale at Green Oasis in the spring of 2015.

In my observation and understanding, clothing can often be regarded as “the tip of the iceberg”, under which there is a rich and multidimensional cultural tradition to be discovered. In the case of Finnish Kale, obeying purity rules is one of the main vehicles for expressing Roma Identity. The meaning of the conceptual binary pairs, clean-unclean and honour-shame, are broader than in the language used by the majority Finnish population.



**Figure 11 Romanian Roma (badănari) attending evangelizing meeting in the spring of 2015.  
(Photograph Lidia Gripenberg)**

These concepts relate to a complex network of moral and social norms. The concept clean/pure is connected with concrete hygiene as well as ritual purity. Viljanen, who has conducted anthropological research on Finnish Kale for more than 30 years, argues that behind these categories is the division of the human body into the clean upper part and the unclean lower part, which the following table presents. (Viljanen, Hagert, and Blomerus 2007: 460-461; Viljanen 1974: 236). According to Viljanen et al. (2007, 461-462), an object or space in immediate proximity of or indirect contact with the upper part of the body is considered clean.

**Table 1 The symbolic meaning of body areas**

(Viljanen, Hagert, and Blomerus 2007, 461; Viljanen 1974:236)

	Human body	Social level	Objects	Space	Moral
Clean	head mouth upper body	elderly: man woman deceased	pillow headgear dishes food table kitchenware horse horse equipment	upstairs windows kitchen	respectable virtuous moral high moral
	hands	children		sauna	
Unclean	lower body feet genitals anal areas	young: man woman non-Roma	shoes trousers skirt underwear bottom sheet	floor cellar downstairs WC	shameful desecrated dishonorable immoral

For example, food dishes belong to the category of clean objects, even if they have not been washed after use. In using the word “clean”, the interlocutor must be able to distinguish whether hygiene or ritual purity is in question through the context and the tone of the speaker. Kitchens, for example, are ritually unclean if young Roma woman not wearing Kale clothing have been present, as are lower floors, when young people have been residing on an upper floor. Water-clean designates a ritually unclean object that has been washed, for example a washed carpet. Ritual purity also concerns the hierarchic Roma community social structure. The community’s cleanest and most highly respected people, the elderly, are



higher up the ladder; young women of fertile age stand lowest in the hierarchy (Viljanen, Hagert, and Blomerus 2007, 461-462).

In the context of this study, obedience to purity rules in the instances of interaction between Finnish Kale (the group Viljanen studied) and East European Roma was often reduced to following the rules of concrete hygiene. When Finnish Kale organized evangelizing meetings for East European Roma, they always served food in connection with the gatherings. Sometimes there was cooked food and sometimes there were sandwiches served with coffee and tea, but it was always important that no one should leave the meeting hungry. In preparing for the event, they took special care to arrange the tables so that people had to go past the sink and wash their hands before reaching the food point. An elderly Finnish Roma man would go first as an example. The people who prepared the food would also take care that it was done in a ritually correct manner. According to Viljanen (2018), the Finnish Kale purity rule concerning food is: *“kaiken mikä menee suuhun, pitää olla puhdasta”* (“*everything that goes into the mouth must be clean*”). East European Roma could participate in preparing the food, but they had to be attended to by a Finnish Kale and taught the rules. Bags with food in them could only be placed on the table, if a dish was dropped on the floor or a chair it would be discarded, etc. Even so, Finnish Kale organizing the meetings were aware that not all of the attendees would partake of food prepared by unfamiliar people, even if they needed it.

The following is an example of an occasion when the effect of purity rules on everyday life could be clearly observed. Ivan’s children had been invited to a youth meeting of Finnish Roma in one of the suburbs of the Metropolitan area.

We came to the meeting about 15 min in advance. The leader, Allan (pseudonym, Finnish Roma), and 4-5 other men were sitting on the sofa in the entrance hall. I greeted them and explained that I had come as an interpreter for the Bulgarian Roma and that we had been invited by Janette (pseudonym Finnish

Roma). After a while, Allan asked a Finnish Roma woman to take care of the kitchen work. They seemed to offer coffee and sandwiches every time they meet. She was somewhat annoyed to be the only person appointed to the task, so I suggested I and two of Ivan's daughters-in-law of Ivan could help. She agreed to let us help with the tea and coffee and buns. We did what we were told and finished quite fast, since there were three of us. I asked her if we could help with the sandwiches but she replied that it was not necessary. I asked her whether it was important for her to prepare them herself. She replied with a somewhat uneasy smile, "Yes, it is". "Ok, I understand" I replied.

She asked me to find a larger platter for the sandwiches and I brought one from the larger neighbouring kitchen. She placed baking paper over it and then the bread, but then suddenly she asked, as if she was deeply concerned about something, "Are those other people using the other kitchen?"

"You mean these darker people?" I replied, meaning the Somalians attending the same Youth Centre.

"Yes," she confirmed.

"Yes, they do," I answered, "Do you mean the platter is not ok then?"

"Yes," she said.

"But there is the paper in between. Does it help?" I asked.

"I don't know, Allan doesn't say anything ..." she commented irritably.

"Well, I know a little bit about these things", I said, "Allan brought me the kettle from the same kitchen, so most probably the platter is also ok." That seemed to be enough.

In this example, the issue was the ritual purity of the food and the way it was used as a delimiter between one's own group and other Roma groups and/or the rest of the world. To my understanding, my Bulgarian Roma friends and I were allowed to make tea and coffee, arrange the table and cut the buns, since in that

process we were not in direct contact with the food as we used gloves when cutting the buns. Making the sandwiches, however, had to be done according to the Finnish Kale tradition in a ritually clean manner and our help in this task was not welcome. In addition, there was the question of whether placing the sandwiches on the platter utilized by the rest of the customers of the Youth Centre could potentially compromise the purity of the food and whether a paper cover was sufficient protection from pollution.

The ritual purity of the food was a concern not only for the Finnish Kale. Among the East European Roma visiting Day Centre Hirundo, there were representatives of some groups who considered themselves to be purer Roma and higher in the unwritten hierarchy of Roma groups. There were some members of *Zlatari* (*from gold*) who would explain to me at length that they are the purest of all Bulgarian Roma, who speak the most authentic Romani, are the richest with the most inherited gold, and have the oldest Roma traditions. According to Marushiakova and Popov (1997:74), *Kardarashi*, which is the meta-group for *Zlatari* in general, position themselves highly on the ladder of unwritten Roma hierarchy. Erolova (Еролова 2003, 285-286) affirms that *Kardarashi* to a large extent frame their ethnic identification by juxtaposition with and repudiation of other Roma groups. They call other Bulgarian Roma *tsustsumani*, a pejorative expressing their inferior status in respect to *Kardarashi*. As Christmas approached, the purity hierarchy of the groups at the Day Centre acquired a more tangible form. Hirundo organized a Christmas party every year for all its customers and supporters. The Christmas parties were attended by some Finnish Roma as well. The food at the party was prepared by the regular visitors to the Day Centre as Roma are known as skillful chefs. For Christmas 2014, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma groups were allocated 100 euro each for the ingredients needed. Those groups seemed to like different food and did not mix much socially in any other way either. On the parties, they would taste each other's food but basically eat their own.

Hirundo's Christmas party was held on 11.12.2014 from 3 to 5pm. The main hall of the Day Center was full of people, sitting and standing. There must have been more than 100 people, even though on regular days during the winter 20-30 people attended the Day Centre, sometimes even fewer. Obviously the Christmas Party had attracted people who had once been customers of Hirundo but eventually found accommodation and settled more or less permanently in the metropolitan area. The Bulgarians had prepared their own food: chicken soup, salad and "мляко с ориз" (milk with rice). The cooks were Hristo and Milena. The Romanians had made a huge number of delicious cabbage rolls. The Bulgarians and Romanians sat in two large groups, more or less separately. As mentioned before, they ate mostly their own food but tasted each other's food as well. At "the Bulgarian table" there was a group of four women and a man who did not eat anything. They were *Zlatari*, and had said already the previous day that they would not eat food prepared by the poor people. They had brought coffee with them from the outside and were enjoying it in addition to soft drinks.

The performative nature of Roma Identity is highlighted in detail in the ethnographic study of the Spanish Gitanos of Jarana by Gay y Blasco (1999) *Gypsies in Madrid: Sex, Gender and Performance of Identity*. Gay y Blasco describes "Gypsiness as something that, in order to exist at all, needs to be continuously created or performed" (Gay y Blasco 1999, 180). Gitanos separate themselves and position themselves as better than the non-Roma, by their "way of being", through their behaviour and how they manage their bodies. For women, that implies preserving their virginity until marriage and remaining faithful to their husbands, as well as showing respect to their parents-in-law. Men are in turn expected to be courageous and knowledgeable, worthy of respect. At the core of performing Gypsiness is the evaluation of one's own and other's behaviour with respect to "Gitano laws" and granting levels of respect and status accordingly (Gay y Blasco 1999, 174-179).

By comparison, the Roma I studied in Helsinki, even when not consciously or deliberately performing their Roma Identity, had a strong sense of its existence as an identity and did express it. In my opinion in general, while a lot of the research on Roma Identity discusses its performative nature, in practice it is difficult to know when people unconsciously express their identity and when they deliberately perform it. The Roma Identity of a person is also not only dependent on the expression and performance but on the surrounding population recognizing him/her as Roma, irrespective of the person's own will. Occasionally, a negative recognition (racism) could be as powerful a way of creating that identity as its positive recognition (pride in being Roma). Expressing and Performing of Roma Identity among the participants of my research, however, played an essential role in positioning themselves with respect to other Roma groups and non-Roma. Taking care of the ritual purity of their food and abiding by the unwritten rules of "*Romani law*" ("*Цигански закон*") or "*Kale culture*" ("*Kaale kultuuri*") enabled them to acquire specific levels of respect and status for themselves. *Zlatari* felt that they were purer and more respectable Roma than the other visitors to the Hirundo Day Centre, since they refrained from consuming the food prepared by poor people, which the rest of the guests enjoyed. On this occasion, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma also distinguished themselves from each other by largely adhering to their own dishes.

While taking care of the hygiene and ritual purity of the food served during public meetings, was usually sufficient to preserve the ritual purity of Finnish Roma and those of the East European Roma groups who followed such cultural traditions, sharing accommodation required more. Different traditions had to be matched in order to uphold the identities of both parties. Usually, the Finnish Kale had to teach their guest "*Miten tässä talossa eletään*" (*how to live in this house*). The most important issues seemed to revolve around the way food, tableware and bedlinen were handled. However, if the guests were to stay

for extended periods such as several months at a time, they had to learn many other details of the Finnish Roma traditions.

Diljan and Emilia (pseudonyms of Bulgarian Roma) asked their host Jasmin (pseudonym of Finnish Roma) to try to accommodate their daughter Ilina (pseudonym) in the home of Tanja (pseudonym) who lived close by. Tanja was a young Finnish Kale woman I had known for a few years. Tanja came later in the evening to Jasmin's home and I had to translate for Emilia her request. Actually, Emilia first told her request in Romani language but Tanja understood only a small part of it, since she didn't speak the language. Emilia said something like "*Muri tsai bebessa, avela ...*" (*My girl with a baby is coming*) Tanja agreed and said that it's of course ok. I asked Tanja whether it bothered her that she did not know when her guests would leave, and she replied, "*It's ok, they can stay a couple of weeks,*" although she was a bit worried about when she would be away visiting her parents in Sweden.

Jasmin comforted Tanja that she would take care of her home and show the place to Ilina if Tanja happened to be away when Ilina arrived. Jasmin also said that she would teach Ilina "*Miten siinä talossa eletään*" (How to live in this house). Jasmin suggested that Ilina bring her own bed linen with her, since it would be bad if she didn't wash her hands before going to bed. Tanja replied that she would usually get new linen for her guests and give it to them as a present when they left the house. That way she would be safe from bedbugs. "*Mä pelkään ötököitä,*" (*I am afraid of bugs*) she said.

"*Arvaa,*" (*"Guess"*) Jasmin replied as she laughed "*Elli-mummo sanoo, et nää ei oo mitään mustalaisia. Kun se Diljan koski häneen.*" (*"Grandma Elli said that they are not Gypsies because Diljan touched her."*). The last statement reflects the purity rules and social organization of Finnish Kale, where elders are given the most respect and are placed on the highest level of the purity hierarchy. Earlier research has shown that Finnish Kale show respect for elderly people by not touching them; an informant has shared with Anna Maria Viljanen that "*vanha ihminen on kuin pyhä kappale*" (*"an old person is like a*

sacred object”) (Viljanen 2018). The Bulgarian Roma man Diljan unintentionally broke a Finnish Kale custom and thus was disqualified from being a Gypsy by Grandma Elli.

Understandably, the newcomers often did not have much say about how things should be done. Many of them were struggling to fulfil their basic needs (physiological needs and safety) and Roma or any other kind of identity seemed to be a distant idea. Sometimes I felt that they could be just as much Roma or non-Roma as necessary to deal with a specific urgent situation. This, however, was not always the case. In some instances, informants would show great courage in defending their principles.

Such was the example of a young (a 17-year-old at the time) Bulgarian Roma girl whom I got to know fairly well. I will call her for the purpose of this story Milena. Milena had left her parents, who had migrated to one of the biggest capitals of Europe, to join the man of her dreams, Radostin (also Bulgarian Roma). As her parents did not approve of this relationship, the couple had to move “far enough” and they had arrived to search possibilities to settle in Finland in the spring of 2014. At the time we met, Radostin and Milena had no permanent address and were making a living by selling the magazine *Iso Numero*<sup>10</sup> and gathering cans. They sent a large amount of their income to their families abroad. Their home was a cabin they had found empty by chance while strolling in the town. The cabin was situated in the centre of Helsinki, close to Kalasatama. It was of the type used for accommodating construction site workers or offices and had an electricity supply. As they had no access to sanitary facilities, the couple were frequent visitors to Hirundo Day Centre, where we met in the autumn of 2014.

In the second half of November, however, the situation changed. Obviously, someone had noticed the squatting and the door and window of the cabin were taken away. Nothing was stolen, but the message was clear: they had to leave. For the next month and a half Radostin and Milena were homeless, resting

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<sup>10</sup> *Iso Numero* (The Big Number) is a magazine sold on the streets, which offers poor people the opportunity to improve their income. The seller keeps half of the magazine's price.

at Hirundo Day Centre during the day. Hirundo was open four to five hours a day during the week; the rest of the time they strolled in shopping centres and in the streets. The nights were the hardest: the only place open through the night was the waiting hall of the central bus station in Helsinki. There, however, one had to be careful of the guards. If they noticed someone loitering in the hall for too long, let alone sleeping in the chairs, the person would be sent out of the building. Somewhere in the middle of this period a Finnish Roma woman would gladly have accommodated Milena but was not ready to take a man into her house. Milena was absolutely sure she did not want to leave Radostin alone in the street and go to sleep inside herself. We were living the very heart of the winter in a Nordic country. The weather had been mild at  $\pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$  but the temperature could drop to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  or even lower at any moment. Milena was not the only one who refused shelter. Many other women would have been accommodated by Finnish Roma but preferred to sleep in cars with their families. The same issue was discussed later, when churches and third sector associations started to arrange emergency shelters but would have accommodated only the weakest of the migrants, the women and children. It was considered immoral for a Roma woman to accept accommodation while her husband was homeless.

A number of studies from the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 2000s focus on how Roma Identity / Gypsiness is embodied and performed in everyday life. (Gay y Blasco 1999; Slavkova 2007; M. Stewart 1997; Theodosiou 2010). In his study of a Roma community in Harangos, Hungary, Stewart (1997) asserts that Roma Identity has a prominent performative nature, through which the group aims to separate themselves from the disdainful non-Roma (*gadžo*) world. For these people being a Rom means being different from *gadžos* through living by *romanes* (Gypsy culture; the same word is used for the Gypsy language) and being occupied with *romani butji* (Gypsy work). Gypsy work presents an ideology comprising a way of doing and seeing things in different areas of life – household, labour, social reproduction, but most importantly time itself, seen as a never-ending present. According to Stewart,



Roma in Harangos managed to persist under a Communist state both by observing and at times neglecting *romanes*; it was because they had so little control over their lives that they attempted to achieve a “hermetically sealed identity”. The scholar suggests that for these Roma, their way of living is constructed in relation to the specific social context in which they live (M. Stewart 1997:234-243). For Roma in Helsinki, expressing and performing Roma Identity was a way of distinguishing between themselves and other Roma groups as well as between Roma and non-Roma in general.

The East European Roma who had settled in Finland for some time were in a different position. It was clear that they had better opportunities to choose the expression and performance of their identity. As described by Eriksen, one of the characteristic of ethnicity is its situationality, in other words people may prefer to affiliate with different ethnic groups depending on the situation, providing there is a legitimate choice (Eriksen 2001:263-266). I had the opportunity to follow one Bulgarian extended family closely, who had settled in Finland in 2008, shortly after Bulgaria joined the EU. During the first year, the members of that family enjoyed the freedom of their new society. They kept saying that Finns are very polite and much more tolerant than Bulgarians. After a while we realized that they were not recognized as Roma by the majority population in Finland and they had been released from the shadow of the stigma constantly following them in Bulgaria life. Similar experience had the Slovakian Roma, studied by Grill (2018), in the first years of migration to Britain shortly after Slovakia entered the EU in 2004 (Grill 2018:1151).

At that time the members of the family that I followed, seldom hesitated to attend Finnish Roma (usually Pentecostal) gatherings. Unfortunately it didn’t take long before a larger number of East European Roma entered the country. Many of them were seen begging on the streets. Some members of the family started complaining that they had been shouted at and insulted on the streets. The majority population had learned to recognize some of them by physiognomy as East European Roma. Some of the younger

generation of that family started to avoid Roma gatherings and warned me not to invite them to any events where they could be recognized as Roma. These people were striving for a better future for their children who had been born in Finland and had better opportunities to perform a different identity from the stigmatizing Roma Identity. Still other members of that extended family chose to ally with Finnish Roma activists and would at times highlight their Roma Identity. As Theodosiou (2010:340) pointed out in her ethnographic descriptions of Gypsies in Parakalamos, Greece, some of them “chose to wear” their Roma Identity whenever they felt it was suitable.

Expressing and performing Roma Identity was probably the most noticeable means used by participants of this study to affirm commonality or difference between different Roma groups in their mundane encounters. In addition, in my observation Roma in Helsinki perceived commonality in the form of common understanding.

## **2.2 Roma Identity as Common Understanding**

In this section I will give examples of how common understanding was seen and understood as signifying commonality in identity.

Following is a description of an occasion where young Bulgarian Roma Family was being introduced to Armas and Sanna Lindberg, the leaders of the NRFF. A few years before migrating to Finland, Ivan Hristov had handed over the pastorship of their home church in Bulgaria to his eldest son Nasko. Being responsible for the flock, Nasko was the only one of the Hristovs’ four children who did not migrate to Finland. At the end of September, Nasko and his wife Biljana visited their relatives in Helsinki. Armas wanted to get acquainted with the young pastoring family, who were in their mid-thirties at the time. On 23.9.2014, Ivan, Dimitrinka, Nasko, Biljana and I visited Sanna and Armas at the NRFF office on Elimmäenkatu. The Lindbergs had their younger daughter and little son with them in the office. The

hosts greeted their guests very warmly. Ivan asked Armas if he spoke Romani language and Armas replied that his parents had not taught him, even though they knew the language well. Armas was very interested in the work Biljana and Nasko did in the region of Korten and Nova Zagora. He wanted to know how many and what kind of people attend the church. According to Nasko, the church is attended mostly by Kalidjii and more than 100 people attend during the winter, but in the summer many travel and work elsewhere, also abroad.

They talked about Biljana's father, whom the believers at his hometown Varna in Bulgaria call "*Apostola*" ("The Apostle"). Biljana told of how God called him when he went to the church to pray to be healed of his blindness. At the time, *Apostola* was the bishop of several Pentecostal churches and was consulted by many people, Roma and Bulgarian alike. I happened to know that a lot of the Bulgarian Roma visiting Finland came from the region of Slanchevo and Ignatievo near Varna. Bilajna added that some of them attended Biljana's father's church in Varna. Armas was intrigued by the life of young Roma in Bulgaria: their educational opportunities, marriage customs, whether they experienced problems with drug and alcohol abuse, whether some of them would be interested in attending Bible school, etc. The young couple answered that the young Roma in Bulgaria do have problems but if they go to church they leave all substance abuse and are encouraged to seek an education. Many *Kalaidjii* women are illiterate, because their parents are afraid that they will be stolen at school, since *Kalaidjii* practice the tradition of bride price.

About a week later the interlocutors continued their conversation in connection with a home visit. Nasko and Biljana added that *Kalaijii* also have to avoid certain places because of feuding between kin groups and cannot move freely. Armas replied that it is good that there are Roma churches in Bulgaria where Roma can discuss these issues and get teaching about them. In Finland, Roma go to the churches of the main population and such things are of course not taught there. Armas felt that these things are binding

Finnish Roma and they cannot progress in their spiritual life. Ivan brought up the youth meeting he had attended recently. He was very disappointed that the youth leader was selling clothes there during the time of the meeting instead of coming to the meeting. Armas replied that the youth leader was in a “cold place” with his faith but he was planning to talk to him. Armas instructed Ivan that he could also advise the young man, and his advice would be taken seriously, since he is an older Roma man.

At times the ability of representatives of different groups to find common understanding or at least avoid open conflict genuinely surprised me. Such was the case of Ivan’s plan to found a church for Bulgarian Roma in Finland. Evangelizing meetings were held weekly at Green Oasis during the period 5.11–11.12.2015. Ivan would have been very glad to preach every time but Armas appointed a preacher for each occasion, as well as people responsible for the kitchen. Most of the time the preachers were Finnish Roma evangelists. After the initial enthusiasm and as time went by there were fewer people involved with the evangelizing meetings. A few of them, however, seemed to be seriously engaged and some seemed to be pursuing their own agenda. This was the case with Ivan who intended to found a Bulgarian church where he could be pastor. The differences in intentions and plans were addressed indirectly. I once discussed this issue with Armas frankly, since I was wondering whether Armas had got the correct message. I told him that for Ivan the evangelizing meetings were just a step in founding his own church. Armas explained that he could understand Ivan very well and sympathized with him but the NRFF could not get involved with establishing a Bulgarian church. Armas was very skillful in expressing his opinion without offending his interlocutor and asking open questions. Ivan was deft at avoiding the questions in his answers and eventually bringing in his own plans.

According Bashkow the perception of shared cultural identity rests more on shared understanding rather than on actual similarity of identity (Bashkow 2004:452). The current study has provided plenty of examples in support of that statement. Even though Romani studies recognize the term “core Romani

culture”, it is also well known that the cultural traditions of different groups can in some cases be radically different. Hancock (2010:23-24) asserts that the Roma population has been heterogeneous since their departure from India. The ethnic identity of the different Roma groups has been augmented by features from different European cultural traditions during their migration west. He acknowledges that some Roma groups, like those in Hungary and Spain, have practically lost the “core Romani culture”. In the examples above, the participants experienced commonality in discussing the challenges that their communities faced, which they suspected to be associated with their similarity in tradition. Such were the rules of avoidance characteristic of some Roma groups, as well as education and wellbeing of youngsters and the obstacles posed by specific wedding customs and the tendency to start families young. While communicating with different Roma groups during the years, I found a few attributes that appeared to be common across groups. These were: reverence for large families, respect for elderly people, patriarchal family organization, admiration for the beauty and modesty of women, keeping a clear border between themselves and the non-Roma population and common experiences of discrimination.

Based on their long-term (over 30 years) ethnologic research on Bulgarian Roma, Marushiakova and Popov (1997:78) have listed the characteristics of the hypothetical ideal well-preserved Roma group.

- Presence of group consciousness
- Preserving “blood purity”- only those born into the group can be members
- Observance of group endogamy
- Common language
- Common traditional lifestyle – sedentary or nomadic
- Common means of subsistence (profession or occupations)
- Existence of self-government structure
- Observance of group rules, norms and prohibitions (*maxrimé*)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For American Rom-Roma “*marime*”, Finnish Kale “*marhattu*”, refers to the set of rules the violation of which may cause a person to be excluded from the group

- Common life perceptions: values, opinions, moral principles, religion
- Large families and strong clans given highest value
- Restricting friendly contacts outside the group

While the “ideal well preserved Roma group” is fiction, I find this list of characteristics useful. During fieldwork but also prior to fieldwork, I have had the possibility to communicate with and observe different Roma groups. Those observations cannot be taken as an absolute truth but rather as a source of understanding. My observation is that Roma groups, who have memory of life prior to sedentarisation, for example Bulgarian Kardarashi and Finnish Kale display several of those characteristics like common language, group endogamy, observance of group rules and prohibitions as well as existence of self-government practices. Groups, that have been settled for longer periods amongst the main population have some but fewer of these characteristics. For example Bulgarian Dasikane Roma have common language, common life perceptions and reverence for large families but they lack self-government practices, endogamy is not mandatory and their lifestyle resemble closely the lifestyle of the main population.

These common attributes, usually in addition with Pentecostal faith, appeared to me to provide a sufficient basis for achieving common understanding between informants representing different Roma groups. The conversations I witnessed between Finnish Kale and East European Roma usually revolved around family life, the wellbeing of elders and children and the communication between generations. An important topic of interest was “typical Roma culture” traits like existence of self-government structures, conflict resolution patterns, marriage customs, pollution rules, etc. In her ethnographic study on Spanish Gitanos in the Jarana region of Madrid, Gay y Blasco affirms that the people she worked with distinguished between different Gitano groups as more or less “true Gitanos”, but at the same time they saw “all of the different Gitano and non-Gitano – equally part of the “Gitano people”-in spite of the fact

that they may have different customs” (Gay y Blasco 1999:5). Similarly, most of the Finnish Kale I have met understand that there are other Roma in the world, whom they refer to with the common appellation Foreign Kale (*Ulkomaan Kaalet*). Foreign Kale may and most often do have different customs from Finnish Kale but are nevertheless distinguished from *gadze*. Often, Finnish Kale would consider themselves as more authentic Gypsies (*oikeita mustalaisia*) than Foreign Kale, because of the group’s distinctive cultural traits and specific folk costume they wear. I was told this in many formal and informal conversations, for example when the Finnish Kale Grandma Elli disqualified a Bulgarian Roma man as a Gypsy because he was unaware of a certain Finnish Kale custom. However, on many occasions, a Finnish Kale would state that a Foreign Kale was “more Kale”, because he or she behaved in a “more Gypsy way”. This often happened when Finnish Kale working as employees or volunteers at Hirundo Day Centre were in close contact with the East European Roma visitors. In their opinion “*nää Kaaleet ovat enemmän Kaaleita*” (“those Gypsies/Roma are more Gypsies/Kale”) because they took care of their own, were empathic and helpful towards needy people and were cheerful in the face of life challenges, while many of their women were modest and had high moral standards.

The perception of commonality in Roma Identity of the participants during conversations and discussions was built to a large extent upon common understanding, at the same time clearly acknowledging the vast variety of traditions. Occasionally the informants would also bring up the issue of the origin of the Roma and who could be classified as Roma, which I will discuss in the following section.

### **2.3 Roma Identity as Inherited**

The theme of the origin of Roma was not central to my research. As was the case with Gitano people studied by Gay y Blasco (1999:14) in Madrid, many of the people I worked with were rarely if ever interested in their land of origin. My observation is that the East European Roma who had recently migrated or were visiting Finland had more urgent issues to attend to. Most of them were earning a

precarious living trying to find employment in Finland or save some money from collecting cans and begging to bring back home. A large part of what they earned was sent home to needy families and relatives. Nevertheless, the idea of a common Roma land of origin was occasionally referred to, most often by Roma activists who stressed the transnational unity of Roma groups. In sermons at Pentecostal gatherings, when Finnish Roma were preaching to East European Roma or vice versa, one could often hear the statements “*We are one people*” or “*We are one nation*” in addition to “*We have the same blood*” or “*I have a Gypsy heart*” (meaning *I understand you or I feel for you*). The question of where these people or nations had come from did not seem to be very important. What was more important seemed to be the position of those people in spiritual terms “*before God*” and in social terms, their place in society in comparison with other populations. Many of the Pentecostal Finnish Roma believed that Roma are the ‘*lost tribe of Israel*’<sup>12</sup>, who had migrated through India and learned different variations of Sanskrit there.

The following is one of the occasions when the issue of Roma origin was directly addressed. Armas and Sanna, the Finnish Roma couple employed by NRFF, were visiting the Hristovs (Bulgarian Roma living in Finland for several years). The two families had become acquainted as part of their plan to organize evangelizing meetings for East European Roma in Finland. I was present with my family and acted as an interpreter in the conversation. Armas asked us about our views on the history and origin of the Roma. He suggested that their language (Romani) supports the idea that Roma are from India but he himself believes they were not originally Indian but travelled there from somewhere else. He also mentioned the theory of Roma being the lost tribe of Israel, since there are many similarities between the Jewish and Roma culture. Ivan stated that he was not so interested about where he has come from, but rather who he

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<sup>12</sup> The search for the “lost tribes of Israel” is one of the great myths of Western civilization. According to the Bible, each of the twelve tribes of Israel were descendants of one of the twelve sons of Jacob and the land of Israel was divided between them. According to the historian Tudor Parfitt (Parfitt 2002), ten of those tribes disappeared from the pages of history centuries before Christ but the Bible had foretold that they would be reunited in connection with the final redemption of the people of Israel. This story has historically been used to explain the origins of several peoples around the world.



was in the present, how he lived his life and where he was heading to. For him the most important thing was to serve God and to go to Heaven one day. He wanted to spend his life telling other Roma about Jesus, so they could also be saved and go to Heaven. *“God is going to ask us how we have spent our life one day,”* he noted.

During this conversation, and in several other situations, I noticed that for many Roma their religious identity “overrides” their Roma Identity. My observation is that this is particularly the case for Bulgarian Roma, such as Ivan’s family, who have been settled for centuries and to a large extent have been assimilated into the majority population. Marushiakova and Popov (1997:58) earlier described how Roma groups who have been settled for longer accept a way of life closer to the main population and lose many of the cultural traits of Roma groups who had remained nomads or semi-nomads until the past few decades. This was also visible in an earlier study I performed in connection with this thesis.

*(Ivan) We look at their (Bulgarians’) way of life and take their example; we try to take the best of it. Bulgarians are hardworking; they like to build good houses and to furnish them nicely. That we take from them. We want to leave the “Gypsiness”, because the Gypsiness is not good; we don’t like it. Because the Gypsies like to wander around and are poor and live in misery. But we want to live like “white people”. We came to Finland because of the great crisis in Bulgaria; there was no work.*

Even though one could argue that the statement was addressed to me being Bulgarian as a gesture of politeness, knowing the family for about 20 years convinced me that their lifestyle differed little from that of the majority population, except for their slightly larger, closely-knit extended family. There are some customs that they regard as specifically Roma customs, which however can be found in the preceding generations of several social groups: for example, the demand for the virginity of brides and modesty of women in general. That is not the case for Roma groups who have settled more recently,

such as the Finnish Kale in the 1970s and Bulgarian Kardarashi in 1950s. These groups have strongly expressed Roma Identity and specific cultural traits. Their Roma Identity may become secondary to religious identity but it is seldom completely overwritten.

According to Stewart (2013:418), the idea of finding historical roots to define and explain the existence of the Roma population is rarely supported in the field of anthropology. This idea is more common in linguistics, where scientists have been able to trace some of the Romani language forms spoken today back to languages spoken centuries ago in India (Matras 2004). Recent publications in anthropology (M. Stewart 1997; Engebriksen 2007:8-11) focus on the relationship between Roma and non-Roma (*gadze*), and the integration of Roma in mainstream society is crucial for the structure of the social order of Roma groups. Both ethnographers point to relationships of dependence between Roma and Gadze.

The participants in this study were unanimous in the idea that Roma Identity can be only acquired through descent, being born into a Roma family. Spending time with Finnish Roma, prior to my research, I learned that so-called “*wannabes*” (a loanword from English slang) were not much favoured in their eyes, to put it mildly. *Wannabes* were non-Roma who pretended to be Roma or mimicked Roma conduct. An exception was made for majority population people who had married into Roma families. These could follow Kale customs as an expression of respect to family elders, without being viewed as “*wannabes*” (though they were also not Roma). There was only one way to be Roma and that was to be born of Roma parents, and certainly a Roma father.

As one of the main informants of this study was a Finnish Kale whose father was Kale but whose mother was a non-Roma Finn, we often had opportunities to test the limits of who was defined as Roma in interactions with East European Roma. As she did not wear the traditional Finnish Kale skirt but a generic long black skirt, on being introduced, Bulgarian Roma would ask me, “*Om Pomume lu e?*” (“Is she from the Roma?”). I would translate her reply that, according to Kale tradition, she was half Roma on her

father's side. The Bulgarian Roma would wave a hand in a gesture meaning "It doesn't matter", and would state firmly "*Tozaba cu om Pomume!*" ("Then you are from the Roma!").

Occasionally I had to answer the same question personally. Since I understand and speak some very basic Romani and my complexion is "dark enough", I have been asked, both by Finnish Kale and East European Roma, whether I have Roma blood as well. My answer was usually to joke that "I cannot be sure of all the ways of my ancestors, but as far as I know, my family is Bulgarian". On one occasion, one of the Bulgarian Roma explained to me that only "the seed" transmits Roma Identity. If the father was a Roma, the newborn would be Roma as well – their group did not recognize "half Roma".

Several publications studying other groups also report their participants as saying that Roma Identity can be acquired only through descent (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:57; Okely 1983:172). In addition, recent research in genetics suggests that most Roma populations are genetically closer to Indian than European populations (Kalaydjieva 2001; Iovita 2004:268). Based on fieldwork material, my conclusion is that, in the opinions and practices of the people participating in my research, Roma Identity is inherited through descent. However, spending time with the participants of the research during fieldwork as well as with my Roma friends prior to the research, I could also observe how people's Roma Identity was influenced by the attitude of the mainstream population towards them. I will discuss a few instances of that process in the following section.

## **2.4 Constructed through Social Interaction**

Within the context of this study, perhaps the most prominent way in which Roma Identity is formed through the process of external labelling is through discrimination and the attitudes of the surrounding population. Many of the discussions of Finnish Roma with East European Roma, which I witnessed and usually interpreted, revolved around harsh experiences of discrimination and marginalization from the

majority population in their countries of origin. This seemed to be a theme that deeply united people who were in many respects dissimilar. As one of my Finnish Kale friends put it: “*Kaalo on kyllä potkittu kaikkialla, ei oikein tiedä mikä siinä on, miks se on näin.*” (“Gypsies are kicked around everywhere, one doesn’t really know why it should be so.”) During my fieldwork, I could not help being amazed and upset when I noticed the negative attitudes that many of them had toward themselves and their group as a whole. I often encountered statements such as “We are good for nothing,” or “We are just a bunch of people on the wrong side of the law”. Such rhetoric was occasionally employed in evangelizing meetings when Finnish Roma laymen evangelists spoke to East European Roma. Here is an example from one of the evangelizing events:

*“Listen, we Finnish Roma, [most] of us have been liars, thieves, bruisers and criminals. I was like that also. And when I heard that God loves me and wants to forgive my sins, I couldn’t believe it. I thought, I have so many sins, how could He love me and how could He forgive? But I decided to try it out.”* (Diary 12.11.2014 YYY speech at an evangelizing Meeting)

It can be argued that this phenomenon was a part of the Pentecostal process of “Becoming Sinners” as described by (Robbins 2004a) and laid the foundation for the transformation of self-image from “bad” to “good” Gypsy, brought about by the new Religio-Roma Identity as described by (Gyetvai 2016:46). The next chapter of the thesis will discuss in greater depth the influence of Charismatic Christianity on Roma Identity and the interaction between the groups I studied. This was also the kind of stereotype that is used to make generalizations about marginal groups, rather than being an accurate reflection of their behaviour, as argued by Herzfeld (2016, 181).

Many of the people I had met were hard working, kind and considerate, trying their best to find their way in life and take care of their immediate family and kin. In any case, functioning effectively in Finnish society while preserving easily-identifiable Roma Identity was not an easy task.

I recall a situation from the end of the 1990s, which opened my eyes at the time. I was in the centre of Helsinki with my Finnish Kale friend Adele. We had been visiting a Pentecostal evangelist, who lived in Kallio, a region belonging to the inner city of Helsinki. That happened in the middle of the winter and it had been snowing that day and the weather was cold. It was already dark when we left for home and found that Adele's car would not start. We were close to a big marketplace, so there were many cars driving by, even though it was already evening. We tried to stop a car and ask for help. The reaction of the drivers passing by was shocking. Most of them just pulled ahead but several of them rolled down their windows and started shouting at and cursing us. After about 20 minutes a small ramshackle "Lizzie", stopped and a short man with a dark complexion came out. Our only common language was broken English; later on we found out he was from India. As we explained the situation, he took out a rope and towed Adele's car long enough to restart the engine. Adele just nodded her head, saying "*Lidia, God probably allowed my car to fail, so you could see what our life is like.*" It was not the first time I had asked for help in the streets of Helsinki. During my student years I drove my own 12-year-old "Lizzie" (Fiat 127), which kept giving me troubles every now and again but was the only car I could afford. Most of the time I got help quite soon in a kind manner. Obviously, the difficulties we encountered that evening had to do with the traditional Finnish Kale skirt Adele was wearing.

Fieldwork also provided opportunities to get a glimpse of how the image of the "bad Gypsy" was created. Very often at Hirundo Day Centre, the East European Roma visitors would complain about how they had been treated by the security guards of the shopping centres in the Centre of Helsinki. As I spent more time at the Day Centre and other fieldwork sites, I got to know some of the informants personally and I

started to see what that meant in practice. The biggest insult to the informants was that they felt that they were not dealt with on an equal basis with the rest of the population. There were many people gathering cans in the shopping centres and their surroundings, both Finns and foreigners, but Roma seemed to attract particular attention. Two young Finnish Kale women who worked in the Day Centre (one employed and one volunteering) told me that this was a familiar experience for Finnish Kale as well, especially in the past. They had been blamed for wrongdoings they had not committed and removed from public places without explanation. This had changed for the better after the Roma activism movement emerged in the 1970s and Finnish Roma were better able to protect themselves through Roma associations, who would represent them. *“Kukaan ei puolusta näitä ihmisiä, siksi niille voidaan tehdä mitä vaan ...”* (“Nobody defends these people, that’s why anything can be done to them...”) was a phrase used by several of my Finnish Kale interlocutors when discussing the East European Roma in Finland. They meant that the majority population was free to mistreat the East European Roma in Finland, since there was no one to stand up for them.

Finally, in the summer of 2015 I decided to do my best to defend my informants and dropped a hint to some of the security companies that East European Roma “could also raise their voice”, so that their grievances could be heard by influential representatives of society. I contacted the security company serving one of the shopping centres in the metropolitan area, where Bulgarian Roma claimed to be mistreated, stating that I was conducting research for the University of Helsinki and that the people I had been interviewing would like to have a discussion with a representative of the security guards. The management of the company organized a meeting in June 2015. It was important that the people I worked with would be given the opportunity to face their persecutors and state their objections in a proper, constructive manner. The last one was not an easy task, since most of the men were angry and distressed. The following is an excerpt from my diary.

*Radostin, Mlena, Ilian, Petar (pseudonyms) and a couple of other people who I didn't know from before came in front of the shopping centre Ostari (pseudonym) at 11 am to meet the chief of the guards of security company Shield (pseudonym). On the Shield side there were three representatives: an older man (representing higher management), a younger man (representing the management of the security guards) and a younger female, a guard. The conversation went quite peacefully. I had to calm Radostin down a couple of times but otherwise the discussion was quite constructive. The following subjects were discussed:*

*Complaints of the Roma:*

- *Milena (a 18-year-old girl, barely weighting 40 kg) had been knocked down to the ground and detained for a night without clear reason*
- *Petar was put down and pushed to the ground until he could not breathe*
- *Ilian's daughter was so harshly thrown out of the shopping centre that she had bruises all over her hands and arms*
- *The guards swore at the Roma and called them names*
- *The wife of one of the Roma man was expelled from a toilet with her trousers down*

*Shield's reply:*

- *The Roma were disturbing the peace by constantly digging in the garbage bins, which bothered the paying customers of Ostari.*
- *Milena was especially active in digging in the garbage bins*
- *Some women were taking a shower in the toilets and hence the guards threw them out*
- *Roma also swore at guards*

*The requests of the Roma:*

- *To be treated equally with the other people who go to Ostari to gather cans*
- *Not to be verbally or physically abused but to be instructed with respect*

*The requests of Shield:*

- *Shield would send me (Lidia) a list of rules that I would translate into Bulgarian so that the Roma people would know what is allowed*

*Shield would send also a list of phrases in Finnish that they wanted to be translated into Bulgarian. (Diary, June 2015)*

I did not receive any further reply from Shield or Ostari until I got a phone call from one of the managers of Ostari a few months later. The manager asked for advice on how to deal with beggars who were disturbing customers and was content to know that begging that harasses or disturbs people was forbidden in Finland and constituted a sufficient reason to remove a person from the shopping centre. An interesting detail in this situation was that Petar is actually ethnic Bulgarian (i.e. not of Roma descent) but since he socialized with the Roma in the shopping centre, he was treated as one of them.

According to Mayall (2004) a new trend in constructionist studies on Roma Identity emerged in the 1980s. Its central argument is that ethnicity is constantly recreated and remodelled as a response to external conditions, while its base persists (Mayall 2004, 193-195). A number of studies point towards the shaping of Gypsy Identity as a result of labelling strategies by the state, social institutions and media, thus constituting a border-making process that defines Roma as strangers or a pariah group (Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar 1998; Benedik 2011; Bhopal 2008). One influential study, representing the constructionist point of view, is the work of Dutch historians Lucassen, Willems and Cottar (1998), *Gypsies and other itinerant groups: a socio-historical approach*. It is a collection of essays addressing the history of images and representations of Roma in research literature, stigmatization, and government policies towards Roma and how this works in socio-economic terms. Lucassen et al. argue that ‘Gypsy’ is a socially created category dating back to the establishment of the poor relief system in Western Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Only local poor people were provided for and needy immigrants were denied citizenship. In effect this created a new category of “vagrants” and Gypsies, and provided the basis for the future stigmatization of travelling groups as potential beggars. In the process of modern state formation, Lucassen argues, a system for the supervision of citizens was established, with the police as



an institution to fight criminality and promote security. With the further specialization of police in controlling special “dangerous” groups, wandering criminal bands were associated with travelling groups and reinforced the stereotype of Gypsies as parasites and outlaws (Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar 1998:71-73). The authors go on to conclude that the group of people labelled Gypsies in Western Europe were actually those who chose to be self-employed, work with their family and lead an itinerant lifestyle (Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar 1998:171). Similarly, in the current study, Petar, an ethnic Bulgarian, was ascribed Roma Identity by the guards of the shopping centre on the bases of socializing with Roma and sharing their way of generating income.

Herzfeld (2016:181) affirms that stereotypes serve the interests of power and are by definition reductive – that is, they always point to a deficiency of some virtue in the people stereotyped. The marginalized group may at some point internalize the stereotype, as for example the people whom Herzfeld studied in Greece, who excused their actions by stating “We are hot-blooded Mediterranean types, what else can we do?” During my fieldwork, I witnessed Roma being negatively stereotyped by the surrounding population. The experience of my informants was that the people in power – in this case security guards – treated them as a distinctive group, in a harsh and unjust manner that other visitors were not subjected to, occasionally waving them away with the words “Go away, Roma”. At times it seemed that some of the people I worked with had internalized the stereotypes imposed on them and were engaging in self-stereotyping, as was the case with the Finnish Kale evangelist preaching to the East European Roma at the beginning of this section.

Mayall (2004) concludes his study on “*Gypsy Identities 1500-2000*” with the statement that Gypsies “are and have been whoever people have wanted them to be.” Those outside the group constructed the group by setting boundaries and providing images of its character in accordance with the needs of the time. However, arguing that Roma ethnic identity is socially constructed does not mean that it is not socially

real, meaning that there are material consequences as well as social ones. Construction of borders can facilitate identity-building and provide a basis for a strong, distinctive collective identity. The state plays a crucial role in group identity construction by legitimizing particular definitions and setting the rules for official discourse (Mayall 2004:276-278).

In this section I have discussed how Roma identity construction through the action of outsiders of the group, surrounding population and people in power position took place during my fieldwork period. Apart from being constructed through external pressure, in my observation Roma identity was actively constructed and utilized as tool in a process of ethnic mobilization by the Roma themselves. I will address that issue in the following section.

## **2.5 Roma Identity as a Tool for Ethnic Mobilization**

After some time in the field, I sensed that many interactions between Finnish and East European Roma were quite political in character. The NRFF, which organized evangelizing meetings for East European Roma, is a political organization, a country member of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF). Evangelical activities were just some of the many activities they undertook to promote the wellbeing of East European Roma in Finland. For example, in the Annual Report for 2014 the evangelizing events were classified as recreational activities (Suomen Romanifoorumi 2014:10). NRFF has been a member of the steering group of Hirundo for several years. They provided East European Roma with opportunities for work trials with the support from Kela, as well as competence-based qualification placement. During my fieldwork the NRFF helped Romanian and Bulgarian Roma to establish their own associations or join associations in Finland. Many of the Pentecostal Finnish Roma I worked with tried to bring the Gospel to East European Roma and raise the awareness of East European Roma as members of a transnational ethnic community. There were many discussions about similarities in values and cultural traits but also the mundane habits of Roma in different countries. In the following

example, one of the key informants, Angelica, elaborates on the similarities between Finnish Kale and Romanian and Bulgarian Roma. The conversation was provoked by an incident at Hirundo, where a Romanian Roma baby was given a biscuit to hold. Angelica was alarmed that the baby might suffocate but thought that her opinion would not be acknowledged, since she did not have children of her own at the time.

*"Angelica: Se on romaneiden tapa antaa lapsille kaikkea mahdollista käteen. Makkaraa, juustoa jne. Sitten eivät syö kohta enää lämmintä ruokaa. Toinen asia minkä huomasin Bulgariassa oli kun kerättiin kolehtia ja mulla ei ollut kolikkoa mitä laittaa uhri koppaan niin mulle annettiin kolikko minkä sain pudotettua kolehtiin. Ja samalla tavalla toimii suomen romanit jos jollain ei ole mitä laittaa toinen antaa. Se on ollut kyllä ihmeellistä seurata pienissä asioissa samanlaisia toiminta tapoja ☺ Ja ihan samalla tavalla on eläneet ja kerjänneet Suomen romanit täällä kun nyt Romanianlaiset ja Bulgarit. Heillä vaan ei ollut autoa vaan hevoset. Nyt on tullut kirja Suomen romani historia 500v. Kirkot ei edes kastanut romani lapsia 1500-luvulla." Diary 3.11.2014*

*"Angelica: It's a Roma habit to give children all kinds of finger food: sausage, cheese and so on. And then soon they don't eat any warm food. Another thing that I noticed in Bulgaria – when they were gathering offerings and I didn't have a coin, I was given a coin to drop. And the Finnish Roma do the same – if someone does not have anything to give, someone else would give in their stead. It has been wonderful to observe the same manners in small things ☺ And just as Finnish Roma have been living and begging here, now so do the Romanians and the Bulgarians. They just didn't have cars but horses. Now we have a book about the 500 years of Finnish Roma history. The churches didn't even baptize Roma children in the 1500s." Diary 3.11.2014*

A permanent concern both at the organizational as well as at the personal level for Finnish Kale involved in this study was teaching East European Roma how to live in Finland so that they could integrate into Finnish society but also so that they would not spoil the reputation of Roma in general and Finnish Roma in particular. Angelica tried to be a good example to her East European Roma friends in every way; she was not alone in this. On her Bible College graduation day 5.6.2015, she invited all her East European Roma friends to the graduation party and afterwards visited Hirundo. For her it was important to show to her poor friends that a Roma could also get an education and attain a respectable position in society. On 8.4.2015, Angelica represented Hirundo when the municipality of Helsinki made International Roma Day a flag day for the first time in history.



**Figure 12 Angelica on her Graduation day, 5.6.2015, visiting Hirundo Day Centre  
(Photograph Lidia Gripenberg)**



**Figure 13 International Roma Day a flag day in Helsinki for the first time in history on 8.4.2015**

**From the left: Lidia, Secretary General of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs Sarita Friman-Korpela, Ombudsman for Minorities Eva Biaudet and representative of Hirundo Angelica Vironen**

Later in the day representatives of Parliament visited Hirundo in connection with the celebration. Angelica made a speech addressing the Minister of Interior Affairs, Päivi Räsänen from the position of Finnish Roma attempting to support Foreign Roma. In the speech, she stated that she spoke on behalf of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma who had recently entered Finland, because when she looked at them she felt that she could be one of them. Referring to the teaching of the Bible to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31), Angelica pleaded to Räsänen, who is also known as a practicing Christian, for assistance in alleviating the poverty of the East European Roma dwelling on the streets.



**Figure 14 Angelica making speech addressing Interior Minister Päivi Räsänen on 8.4.2015  
(Photograph Lidia Gripenberg)**



**Figure 15 The minister of Social Services and Health Care and Interior Minister at Hirundo 8.4.2015  
The minister of Social and Healthcare Laura Rätty (1st from left) and Interior Minister Päivi Räsänen (3rd from left)**

On the afternoon of 8.4.2015, Mirjami Hekkala, Angelica and one other young women organized a party for the Roma at Hirundo. They had made pizza and cake. Some of the Bulgarian and Romanian Roma present said that this day was not really a holiday for them and for that reason many of them were at work. Easter however was a holiday and they were looking forward to the Easter celebration at Hirundo. This reminded me once again that the issue of ethnic mobilization should not be oversimplified. For some Roma, transnational unity is self-evident, but for some it is a new and questionable idea. Within the scope of this study, Roma transnational unity was most often pursued by Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian Roma and Roma activists. The people who questioned that idea were mostly Finnish Kale, who were conscious that their status as a Finnish minority might be threatened by the actions of newcomer immigrant Roma from East Europe. Several of the non-Pentecostal or Charismatic Christian East European Roma who visited Finland for shorter periods were doubtful about Roma transnational unity as they felt they belonged first and foremost to their own Roma group.

Several authors discuss the role of Roma group ethnic identity in the course of trans-boundary ethnic mobilization, where the central theme appears to be the issue whether Roma group ethnic identity, ought to be perceived as a source or/and result/goal of Roma ethnic mobilization movement (Vermeersch 2006; McGarry 2008; Marushiakova 2008; Marushiakova and Popov 2004). According to Vermeersch (2006) regardless of the existing debates in academic circles on the nature of Roma Identity, there is nevertheless consensus on the idea that ethnic identity is seen as influential instrument in the process of Roma political mobilization. However, Vermeersch argues that the “feelings of group identity” among Roma should be regarded as a consequence of ethnic mobilization actions, rather than cause. In that relation academic studies on Roma Identity have provided suitable bases for political action (Vermeersch 2006:43). Also in the course of this research, my observation is that Roma Identity can be seen as both a source and an outcome of ethnic mobilization. The efforts of Finnish Kale to reach their fellow East European Roma

with the message that they have something in common, that can be empowering for both sides was both inspired by perceived commonality and in turn building this commonality. Angelica was intrigued by the similarity in practices she saw in her own group and the Bulgarian and Romanian Roma she got to know closely in Bulgaria and Finland. At the same time she was actively engaged in building unity on political, religious and grass root level.

Based on more than 30 years of ethnologic research on East European Roma, Marushiakova and Popov suggest that Gypsies can be characterised as “inter-group ethnic community”, particularly as a “transboundary dispersed ethnic community”, called also “inter-group ethnic formation”(IGEF) (Marushiakova 2008:472-473; Marushiakova and Popov 1997:47-48). The Gypsy IGEF represents a heterogeneous social and cultural ethnic community according to these authors, divided into somewhat distinctive, sometimes even conflicting groups organized hierarchically on several levels. The group identity is constructed on the basis of presence or absence of principal ethno-social and ethno-cultural characteristics, in a process of comparison and opposition with “the other” and most importantly “the other Gypsies” (Marushiakova 2008:472-473). There are vast differences in vernaculars (some of which incomprehensible to each other) and cultural traits found in Gypsy groups. Many of them have their own authority structures and some clearly display animosity towards each other. Regardless of that, under the influence of several circumstances, such as common origin, social status and physiognomy features and the stigmatizing attitude of macro-society, Gypsies have developed a strong feeling of belonging to a specific community, including obligations for mutual help and solidarity (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:48).

Fieldwork in the Day Centres and on the streets of Helsinki gave me a possibility to be in contact with representatives of several different Roma groups simultaneously. In these settings, the process of identification was constantly ongoing. Even though several of the participants did not advocate for



international Roma unity, they nevertheless saw other Roma as Roma and different from non-Roma (*gadze*) population. They also distinguished between different Roma groups and recognized some type of unwritten hierarchy between them. For example many informants *Kardarashi* and *Bulgarian Gypsies* (*Dasikane Roma*) alike were of the opinion that *Kardarashi* are “*purser Gypsies*” because their Romani language contains fewer words from the main population language and because they practice more specific Roma traditions.

In an article discussing the role of group ethnic identity in the transnational organizing structures of the Roma social movement and in particular the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF) McGarry (2008) suggests that Roma ethnic identity, though debated, is a source of sense of solidarity and provides a framework for building common interests. However, it is also observable that the Romani elites mostly represented in these organizations avoid debating their ethnic identity, which indicates that such debates are perceived as a threat to the cohesion of the Roma social movement (McGarry 2008:464). Also in the present research I could observe that Roma who were advocating for international Roma unity would understandably downplay variation between cultural practices of different Roma groups and stress on unity of common understanding. On the contrary people advocating for the uniqueness and authenticity of their own or more rarely another group would stress on specific traits. For Finnish Kale that would be most often clothing and purity rules, whereas East European Roma would most often stress on Romani language proficiency and specific cultural traditions. Such traditions could be for example the wedding ceremonies, which for all Bulgarian Roma involve luxurious feasts for some groups lasting several days.

In the previous sections I have discussed the way Roma Identity was lived and understood by the participants of the research. I will now proceed to reflect on Roma Identity and Ethnicity as concepts and their usefulness for this research.

## 2.6 Questioning of Roma Identity and Ethnicity

My experience is that most of the people I have worked with – Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland – describe themselves in terms that reflect the definition of an ethnic group as stated by the Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences: “subgroup within a larger context, presuming common origins and sharing one or several of the elements: place of origin, race, kinship, culture, religion or language” (Phinney 2001, 4821). Even though most of these people, with the exception of Roma activists and some Roma Pentecostals, showed little interest in the narrative of the origin of Roma, their statement that Roma Identity could be acquired only through heritage implied some kind of common origin, at least in physical terms. I have heard Bulgarian Roma telling me that I could become Roma as I speak some Romani, as Stewart was told during his fieldwork with Gypsies in Harangos, Hungary (M. Stewart 1997:59). Some of my Finnish Roma friends would call me “Meijän Kaalo Miritsa (our Kalo girl)” if I behaved, in their opinion, in a Kale manner. I came to understand that this was a gesture of friendship and warm hospitality. In other contexts, such as when introducing or discussing people who had entered their community rather than being born into it, they always remembered to mention that those people were not Roma. On many occasions I have witnessed the irreverent (open or disguised) attitude of Finnish Kale towards *gadzos* who were trying too hard to act Roma and were characterized as “wannabes”.

At the turn of the 21st century, questioning the notion of Roma ethnicity appears to be a prevailing theme in Roma Ethnic Identity studies. (Dust 2011; Gay y Blasco 1999; M. Stewart 1997; M. Stewart 2011) According to Stewart (2011), ethnicity is a generally-used term that takes on different meanings in different settings and labelling a defining a community as “ethnic” involves a danger of hidden racism (M. Stewart 2011:4-5). In various cases, being a Gypsy is shown to become relevant and meaningful only in relation with non-Gypsies (Dust 2011:27; Theodosiou 2010:332). Theodosiou (2010, 327) views

the identity of Gypsies in Parakalamos, Greece, as a performance of difference in which their resemblance to the main population is so pronounced that using the term Gypsy culture or identity would not be appropriate. Rather the Roma perform an identity of “disheveled otherness”, firmly knitted into the performativity of local politics and history of Parakalamos (Theodosiou 2010:332).

To the extent that the Roma groups with whom I worked (most closely Finnish Kale, Bulgarian Kardarashi and Bulgarian Dasikane Roma) believed that they had an implied common origin, a shared common language and what they regarded as long-standing cultural traditions, they can be characterized as belonging to similar, or related, ethnic groups. This, however, does not imply that Roma Identity can be equated with ethnic identity: the depth and level of attachment to the sense of identification can vary considerably. In my experience in Helsinki, a sense of Roma Identity can in some cases simply be understood as a form of social identity, rather than being felt as something deeper, as an ontological reality. As suggested by Stewart, for Rom in Hanagaros, Roma Identity was a way of “creating social space” for themselves, “constructed and constantly remade in relations with significant others” (M. Stewart 1997:28). Gay y Blasco asserts that the Gitano identity in Madrid revolved around a moral stance, “way of being” and living life in a specific “most honourable and righteous manner” (Gay y Blasco 1999:174). For some of the people I worked with, Roma Identity at least sometimes meant belonging to a backward, marginalized and disadvantaged group, or suffering from inescapable labelling by people who belonged to the surrounding dominant social groups.

*(Ivan) Gypsiness is not good, we don't like it. Because the Gypsies like to wander around and they are then poor and live in misery. But we want to live like “white people”.*

*(Diljan) We are orthodox Roma, Christians. We are not from those who sell each other. We are just called Roma but we don't sell our children, our children get married for love.*

As mentioned before, those were usually representatives of *Dasikane Roma* groups, called the derogative “*tsutsumani*” by better preserved groups like the *Kardarashi*. In contrast, *Kardarashi* displayed clearly defined ethnic identity, were knowledgeable about and observed the cultural traditions of their groups and placed themselves high up in the unwritten hierarchy of purity of Roma groups. One example came about during the time of my fieldwork, when two *Kardarashi* families organized a *meshere* (Roma informal court) in Finland to resolve a dispute regarding a case of infidelity. The *meshere*, consisting of respected elder men, decided on the fine to be paid by the guilty party to the family suffering the harm.

In the previous sections I have described the different presentations of Roma Identity that I could discern in my fieldwork data. I will now discuss how Roma Identity was experienced and understood by the participants of the study and how this influenced the interaction of different Roma groups in Helsinki.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

My observation from the current research is that, for the vast majority of those I spoke to, whether Finnish or East European Roma living in Finland, Roma Identity is an exclusively inherited identity, and cannot be achieved in any way other than being born into it. This has also been the case for the peoples studied by Gay y Blasco, Okely and Vilajenen. An outsider can be accepted into the Roma community and “treated as their own” or, according to Silverman (1988:264), as a “tolerated outsider,” but they will be always be an outsider. In that sense, Roma Identity is as strongly generated and asserted by Roma themselves as it is made visible by the behaviour and discrimination that Roma experience from non-Roma. This is not an essentialist statement: I am not saying that Roma Identity is some kind of biological category; rather, the majority of Roma think of it as, and represent it as being, an ontological category, that it simply ‘is’. While some people might point to some specific inherited physical features that non-Roma may draw upon to ascribe a person with Roma Identity that does not mean that all Roma assume Roma Identity. As described by Gay y Blasco, Gypsy Identity can be lost: Gitanos may become *apayados*

if they fail to perform their identity (Gay y Blasco 1999:175). The same observation was made by R.B. Roman (2017:136) in her ethnography of Finnish Kale. Similarly, in this study, informants would view some members or a part of the community as not real Gypsies: “ei o oikeita mustalaisia” (“they are not real Gypsies”), “това не са вече никакви цигани (those are not Gypsies any more)” if they did not express or perform their Roma/Gypsy Identity. As with other identities, Roma Identity may be situational in the sense that a person may choose whether to assume/perform it or not in different situations, whenever it is possible. This is most often the case for those East European Roma groups who do not wear what they regard as traditional clothing and whose cultural traditions are close to those of the majority population. There are also examples of Finnish Kale who would perform main population Finnish identity in their place of employment but express and/or perform Kale identity with their kin and circle of friends.

My work in Helsinki suggests that, for the most part, when Roma from different groups or countries encounter each other, they do not judge their similarity or difference from an evaluation of cultural traditions – as they may differ a lot between groups – but rather kinship, language and, very importantly, a certain shared understating as also described by Bashkow (2004:452), as well as a sense of having similar values, also described by Hancock (2010:23-24) as “core Roma culture”. That shared understanding is occasionally referred to as “Gypsy heart”: a strong feeling and support for those kindred spirits, regardless of the differences between them. Most of the Roma I have met, both Finnish and East European, do not show much interest in the origin and history of the Roma. A few of them (usually Bulgarians) even questioned the validity of the term Roma as such. They felt that they were Gypsies, belonging to their own group, and strongly doubted whether being called Roma would bring any positive development to their living conditions. The people who were interested in the origin of the Roma were usually Roma activists or Roma Pentecostals. Roma activists would support the hypothesis of the Indian

origins of Roma. Roma Pentecostals would be more inclined to discuss the hypothesis of Roma being a lost tribe of Israel who had migrated through India and thus acquired Sanskrit vocabulary.

Phinney defines an ethnic group as a “subgroup within a larger context, presuming common origins and sharing one or several of the elements: place of origin, race, kinship, culture, religion or language” (Phinney 2001:4821). Phinney’s definition is not entirely correct in this case. My research suggests that in the case of Roma, origins are not important. The important point seems to be family connection – the assumption that all Roma come from Roma families, whereas the history of these families is irrelevant. The sense of common family background, the sense of kinship as a people (the model being kinship and not origins), is also partly generated by the use of the names Roma and Gypsy. Giving something a name brings it into existence. The significance and meaning of the ability to “ascribe a name to things and in that name to name their being” has been described and analyzed by Foucault (Foucault 2002:132). For the majority of Finnish Roma I have met, Roma Identity is experienced and described as an ethnic identity, since it is based on consciousness of common kinship and a strong, well-preserved distinctive Kale “*kulttuuri*”. I have also met many people, usually East European Roma but also some Finnish Roma, who are isolated from their group and for whom Roma Identity has faded in importance, and their focus is mostly on the discrimination they have experienced as members of a deprived, marginalized group – without the positive side of participating in the social and cultural life of that group: an identity of “dishevelled otherness”, as described by Theodosiou (2010:332). According to Miranda Vuolaasranta (2015), the current chair of the ERTF, among East European Roma, who have endured slavery, decay of ethnic identity is common. However, for the most part of my experience in the field, Finnish and East European Pentecostal Roma saw their Roma Identity as an empowering and unifying factor and a source of pride.

### **3. I Want to Spend My Life Telling Other Roma about Jesus**

Due to the starting point of my entry into the field as an interpreter for a Pentecostal Finnish Kale missionary group visiting Bulgaria, most of the participants of this study are Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians. Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity is thus an important element that the different Roma groups I worked with share. This chapter focuses on that aspect of their lives and social interaction. My research suggests that Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity acts as a catalyst for the onset of interaction between different Roma groups. Since I was mostly in contact with Pentecostal Finnish and Bulgarian Roma prior to the onset of formal research, my initial assumption was that most Roma from different groups are interested in communicating with each other. During the study I gained a deeper understanding of the relationships between different Roma groups in Helsinki and the role played by Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity in these relationships.

#### **3.1 Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity**

According to Coleman and Hackett (2015), from its very beginning in 1906 at Azusa Street in Los Angeles (1906), “classical” Pentecostalism was distinct for its interracial nature. The movement spread to as many as fifty nations in its first decade. The idea of global expansion is supported by many Pentecostals also today (Coleman and Hackett 2015:12-14; A. H. Anderson 2013:2). The revival emphasized powerful religious experiences connected with spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy, which were perceived as re-enacting the Acts of the Apostles. Classical Pentecostalism has been described as the “first wave” of the revivalist history of Christianity. The “second wave” of revival describes the proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic practices into traditional Christian denominations since the 1970s. The “third wave”, seen also as “a revival of a revival”, refers to the spread of large Holy Spirit-led churches in places with long-established Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions.

According to Coleman and Hackett (2015:15), Pentecostalism has long been a taboo object in anthropology because, as a social phenomenon, Pentecostalism has challenged previously established boundaries of the discipline, such as the distinction between local and global, home and abroad, self and other, etc. However, at the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with the emergence of an anthropology of Christianity as a distinct subfield, Pentecostalism has come to be appreciated as an object of study, precisely because of its strong boundary-breaking tendency (Coleman and Hackett 2015:15). This feature of Pentecostalism is at the core of the current study as well.

Members of different Roma groups, who would by custom abide with the principle of not interfering in each other's business (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:55), would reach out to and support each other in various ways under the influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian teaching (Gay y Blasco 2002:182). In this study, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity is used as a collective term, as defined by Robbins (2004b; 2015) to refer to Charismatic Christian congregations with similar doctrines. This doctrine includes the common evangelical pillars: conversionalism, reverence for the Bible as God's Word, and an ethical-moral code as well as an emphasis on spiritual experiences resembling the phenomena described in the Acts of the Apostles. Welcoming and seeking the supernatural experience of the Holy Spirit available to all believers distinguishes the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity congregation from Fundamentalist Christian congregations, who, although they share most of the major characteristics of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity doctrine, view the gifts of the Holy Spirit as historical phenomena that took place only during the lifetime of the Apostles (Robbins 2004b:122-123; Robbins 2015:246; Robbins 2014:161).

The historian of the Finnish Pentecostal movement, Jouko Ruohomäki (2017), claims that mutual understanding between the Pentecostal and the Lutheran Church in Finland has developed over the years. This was promoted by negotiations between the Lutheran Church and the Pentecostal Movement, which



were held for the first time in 1987-1989 and significantly increased the parties' understanding of each other's faith. The negotiations revealed that the Lutheran Church and Pentecostal Revival have enriched each other with time. For example, Lutheranism has influenced the concept of Pentecostal salvation, while Pentecostal Movement has challenged the Lutheran Church to revise its teaching on the influence and actions of the Holy Spirit (Ruohomäki 2017:100). At the traditional Pentecostal preacher's autumn gathering in Helsinki on 04.10.2018, Pentecostals and Lutherans officially reached an agreement. Archbishop Tapio Luoma, representing the Lutheran Church, and Pastor Klaus Korhonen, representing the Pentecostal Movement, apologised on behalf of their own churches for not respecting and even invalidating each other's beliefs in earlier years (Özcan 2018).

The Pentecostal congregation in Finland, the Free Church of Finland, which was founded as a result of a "second wave" revival proliferation of charismatic practices into the traditional Lutheran Church, and "third wave", "revival of revival" churches, such as the River Church in Helsinki, can all be classified as Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity congregations. There were members of all three types of congregations among the Roma I came to know during my research. These different branches of Charismatic Christianity have specific emphases, which are not important for my current research. What unites them is the importance they place on conversion as an experience of being "born again", which includes acquiring a new ethical inner moral code, "a new heart", stressing the importance of the bible as a "life-guiding manual", and a desire to acquire the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is not to suggest that the differences between specific branches of Charismatic Christianity are not significant in general. Rather I want to point out that the people who engaged in evangelising activities targeted at East European Roma had found ways to downplay those differences for the sake of bringing the "message of salvation" to the newcomers.

Finnish Kale are well represented in local Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, likely because of the religious history of the region. Throughout the history of the Nordic countries, the Lutheran Church has treated Roma in a very discriminatory manner. In practice this meant that the Church denied baptism, wedding ceremonies and funerals to the Roma (Pulma 2006:21-22). Even though Roma in the Swedish<sup>13</sup> empire were permitted to join the Lutheran Church from the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did the Finnish Lutheran Church begin to actually take responsibility for the Kale. In 1994 the Diaconal and Social Work Center established a Roma Affairs Working Group (now the Roma and Church Working Group). The task of the working group is to develop contacts between the Roma and the Church against discrimination and racism (Kirkkohallitus 2005:23-25). According to Thurfjell (2013) Pentecostal churches appear to be the first to welcome Roma without pushing for assimilation. The best days of Kale Pentecostalism in the 1950s and 1960s took place approximately at the same time as the process of integration of Roma in Finnish society advanced significantly – the state provided affordable housing for Roma and many of them entered the labour market. The establishment of the Free Romani Mission of Finland (later Life and Light) and the reformation of the Finnish Gypsy Mission<sup>14</sup> into the Romani Mission are associated with the Romani rights moment initiated in the 1960s. Thus, Pentecostalism was seen as an essential part of the movement (Thurfjell 2013:42-43).

In his *Annual Review* article on “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity”, Joel Robbins (2004b, 117) summarizes the characteristics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity identified by scholars in different locations as responsible for the large spread of the movement. Such features among others are experiences of deprivation and disorganization as a precondition for conversion; stress on evangelization, especially through indigenous channels; egalitarian doctrine;

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<sup>13</sup> At the time Finland was a part of the Swedish empire

<sup>14</sup> The Finnish Gypsy Mission (Mustalaislähetys) was established in 1905 as an attempt to apply assimilation politics towards Roma, known as the “Norwegian model” after the assimilation measures taken against itinerant people in Norway at the time (Pulma 2006: 99).

distinct social organization; characteristic gender, political and economic constructions; complex relationship with local cultures; and institutional productivity. Being a Pentecostal of more than 20 years myself, I can recognize most, if not all of these characteristics of Pentecostalism, and how they operate in the local churches in Finland. Reviewing my fieldwork material, I noticed the specific ways in which some of the features of Pentecostalism have contributed to the interaction of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland. In the following sections I will explore different attributes of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the context of my fieldwork experience. I will also search for new aspects of the phenomena observed during fieldwork and ways to analyze them.

### **3.2 Emphasis on Evangelism through Indigenous Channels**

Pentecostal churches are traditionally known for their strong emphasis on evangelism, right from the onset of the revival at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Cox 2001:101-102; Synan 2001:6-8; Robbins 2004b, 117:124). Six months from the outbreak of the revival in April 1906, thirty-eight missionaries had already been sent to different locations (Cox 2001:101-102). According to J. Roswell Flower, the first General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, cited by McGee (2001): “The baptism of the Holy Ghost ... fills our souls with the love of God for lost humanity, and makes us much more willing to leave home, friends and all to work with His vineyard, even if it be far away among the heathen. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, the missionary spirit comes with it; they are inseparable.” (McGee 2001:73). Assemblies of God, founded in 1914, is currently one of the world’s largest Pentecostal congregations.

Finnish Pentecostal Roma have followed this pattern, approaching East European Roma in different locations with humanitarian help and Pentecostal Missionary work since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1990 and the opening of the borders of the East European bloc countries to influence from the West (R. B. Roman 2017:190-191). After Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, the Roma from these countries could legally enter Finland and other EU countries and reside as tourists or job seekers for three

months at a time. The period of three months could easily be renewed, for example by taking a day trip to Tallinn and back. In practice, the ordinary population did not know what exact information the police and border control had about the whereabouts of EU citizens in Finland. Passport control had been removed from several EU internal border points. Since the beginning of 2007, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma began visiting Finland for extended periods and many of them were visible on the streets of the capital as beggars. The media paid special attention to the phenomenon, which was new for the welfare state of Finland. At this point many Finnish Roma Pentecostals felt that their “mission field” had “come to their home”. Providing humanitarian help and ministering to East European Roma was an entirely new thing, when it had to be integrated with people’s personal lives. Several of my Finnish Roma friends debated the opportunities to approach the newcomers.

The issue was controversial. The presence of the new Roma beggars in Finland appeared to be a test of the identity of Finnish Pentecostal Roma both with regard to their “Gypsiness” and as “good Christians”. A real Gypsy takes pride in caring for his own (Marushiakova and Popov 1997:48; Viljanen 2012:375), especially when they are in trouble. A good Christian in turn is expected to support needy people and share not only the Gospel but also earthly welfare with them. Since, according to Pentecostal doctrine, evangelizing activities require no educational qualification, all believers are called to evangelize in their daily life, not only when participating in missionary activities (E. Willems 1967:108; Robbins 2004b:124). But how best to approach people living on the streets, begging, speaking a very different, hard to comprehend dialect of Romani, and violating essential Finnish Roma cultural norms? The question had no easy answer.

Some Finnish Roma accommodated East European Roma and that did not go without adversity. A relative of my close Finnish Roma friend accepted a Romanian Roma family with children into his apartment. Gradually the Romanian Roma family adapted to their new location, both materially and

socially; the husband was employed and the children were sent to day care. However, the furniture of the apartment as well as the paint on the walls were nearly destroyed, as the new residents were not yet accustomed to living in an apartment building (at least not in the Finnish way). The cost of helping often proved to be unexpectedly high in various ways. Still, a “*Kaalo*” was expected to help. When Ivan and his wife stayed in our home for a couple of months, this evoked genuine admiration in our Finnish Roma friends. We were repeatedly told that we were more “Gypsy” than the average Finnish Gypsy.

Some of the Finnish Roma saw the arrival of Ivan’s family in Helsinki in the spring of 2008 as an opportunity to contact the Roma immigrants through him. Throughout my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered the idea that “a Roma person is best equipped to bring the Gospel to another Roma person”, preferably from the same or a similar Roma group. Research literature characterizes “indigenous channels” as a broadly established means for the proliferation of the Pentecostal movement into a new cultural environment. Recently converted local devotees or repatriates become evangelist, spread the teaching in their own cultural environment and eventually establish new churches (Lehmann 2001:63; Bowen 1996:41; D'Epinay 1969:45; Chesnut 1997:77; Robbins 2004b:124). Ivan and his brother Vasil had been converted at the Bulgarian Pentecostal church in the nearest town, Nova Zagora, at the beginning of the 1990s. Shortly after the visit of the Finnish Roma missionary group to Korten in 1995, they established a Roma Pentecostal congregation in the yard of their house. They transformed the garage, the building in the background of the picture of Figure 1, into a church, whose first pastor was Ivan. The church was attended mostly by Roma from different groups in the region, as well as some Bulgarians.



**Figure 16 Adele Hagert and Miranda and Urpo Vuolasranta visiting the Hristovs in 1996.**

**From left: adults Adele, Dimirinka, Miranda, Minka, Ivan's mother; in the back, Ivan's father, Urpo, Ivan**

Four of the Bulgarian Roma on this picture now live in Finland with their families. Ivan is one of the main participants in this study. In Finland, Ivan's family has a good socioeconomic status: he and his wife are employed and not dependent on welfare benefits. A few Finnish Roma families had resided in his home during their visits to Bulgaria and still remembered the hospitality shown to them. One of those families was Miranda and Urpo Vuolasranta. Miranda Vuolasranta is one of the most prominent Roma activists in Finland and internationally, advocating for international Roma unity.

On 8.4.2010 a Finnish Roma couple, Pekka and Riitta Roth, invited Ivan and his wife Dimitrinka to the celebration of International Roma day organized by the municipality of Jyväskylä. The Hristov family were publicly interviewed about their experiences as Roma migrants to Finland. Another Finnish Roma couple invited them to lunch, shortly after their arrival. However, in general, the Finnish Roma who did not know the Hristovs closely avoided them. Even with old acquaintances, Ivan's family did not experience the closeness they had hoped for. Nevertheless, Ivan wished to be in contact with Finnish

Roma and to spread the Gospel among all people but most of all among Roma. I was invited to many home gatherings as an interpreter. Even though the older generation of Hristov's family are fairly proficient in their local Roma dialect, there were only a few Finnish Roma with whom they could conduct meaningful conversation in Romani.

### **3.3 Rituals of Rupture and Emphasis on Sanctification**

In the spring of 2014 (10.5.2014), I was contacted by my old friend Adele, the first Finnish Roma woman I got to know closely. I had shared a room with her at Ivan's house in 1995. Adele had moved back to the capital area from the countryside and wanted to visit Ivan's family together with Helena, her relative from Sweden. Both women were about sixty and had children and grandchildren. Helena had recently lost her husband and now Adele was planning to move to Sweden with her. The two of them fetched me from my home and we travelled to the Hristovs home in Konala, which was about 5 km from where we lived. Ivan and Dimitrinka got their apartment in 2008, after an extensive two-month search, from Valion eläkekassa, the pension fund of Valio, the largest Finnish dairy company. Even though both were permanently employed with a decent regular income, renting a flat to foreigners with slightly darker skin turned out not to be an easy task, especially when it was to accommodate at least two families. One of the older employees of Valio, Pekka Kentala, showed compassion and understanding to the immigrant family fleeing from their land of origin because of hunger, and rented the flat to them. That way Kentala supported the Hristovs family to settle in Finland. The apartment had two bedrooms, a living room, balcony and a separate kitchen, all in an area of 57m<sup>2</sup>. During the busiest times it was home to three families: six adults and a young child.

Quite soon after we entered Ivan's family's apartment, Helena noted "*I can immediately see that you are Gypsies. Wherever I have visited Gypsies in the World, the style of decorating the house is the same, lots of flowers and ornaments ...* (laughing)." The atmosphere was warm and cheerful. Much of the

conversation was conducted by my Roma friends independently in Romani. Since I had been studying Finnish Romani dialect during 2011-2013, I could now follow the conversation fairly well. The topics revolved around family, children, and elders, their wellbeing and occupations. I provided interpretation when more complicated issues were discussed. Helena and her husband had started work with the migrating Romanian Roma in Sweden at their local church in Uppsala. So far nine Romanian Roma families had joined the church and consequently found accommodation and work and settled in Uppsala. Helena encouraged Adele and Ivan to work with the migrant Roma in Helsinki. She stated:

*First of all they need repentance and cleansing from their sins in Jesus' name. Then God will open the doors to solve their everyday life problems. Migrant Roma are poor, very poor. It is important to offer them warm food and clothes when preaching to them. They must feel we care for them.*” Diary 10.5.14

Becoming free from sin in connection with different “rituals of rupture”, like conversion and baptism, are an important part of the emphasis on discontinuity in Pentecostalism (Robbins 2003:224-227; Robbins 2004b:128). The emphasis on sanctification is present in other Evangelical movements as well (Robbins 2004b:120; Synan 1997; Elisha 2015:46; R. M. Anderson 1979). The key notion of transformation, separating people both from their past and from the surrounding society, is central to Pentecostalism (Martin and Berger 1991:202-204). Thus Burdick (1996) uses the term “cult of discontinuity” to describe Pentecostalism (Burdick 1996:224). Mayer (1998) portrays the way Ghanaian Pentecostals are encouraged to make a clear break with the past, which in practical terms turns out not to be so straightforward (Meyer 1998:340). Gill (1990) describes how Bolivian converts made a clear distinction between the lives they lived before and after conversion. (Gill 1990:714). Once converted, believers are expected to keep a social distance between themselves and what they consider the sinful social practices of the surrounding population. These phenomena are clearly visible in the case of migrant



Roma dwelling on the streets of Helsinki as well. People whose primary occupation had been begging, collecting cans from the garbage bins and occasionally engaging in petty crimes gradually become respected members of the community, diligent workers and taxpayers.

We spent a lot of time reminiscing about our trip to Bulgaria in the summer of 1995, when Adele and I joined the evangelizing group of Finnish Roma visiting Roma in Bulgaria. Adele kept repeating that no one had ever loved her as much as Ivan and Dimitrinka and their family did. The argument of the role of deprivation and displacement in the process of conversion has been widely used in research literature to explain conversion (R. M. Anderson 1979:235; D'Epinay 1969; E. Willems 1967:63). Historically, the Pentecostal revival was initiated at Azusa Street in 1906 by people affected by deprivation and displacement – the half-blind black preacher called Elder Seymour, who had just been dismissed from his position as a pastor, and a few “negro washwomen” with some of their husbands, people on the lowest end of social order of the time (Owens 2001:47). At its dawn, the movement attracted similar city labour migrants, rural unemployed and in general people displaced from their social position due to the drastic social changes connected with industrialization. To deprived and socially displaced individuals, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity provides hope for millennial justice as well an egalitarian environment, where everyone is eligible to achieve success in the spiritual realm. These arguments have been criticized as being necessary preconditions but not sufficient to explain the phenomena of conversion (Holston 1999:613; Chesnut 1997:167; Wacker 1982; S. J. Hunt 2002). My friend constituted a good example of a person deprived from the love and care of her primary family and being placed in foreign conditions. Adele had been separated from her parents at a very young age and raised partly by a Finnish foster family. I remember her telling that she was the only child with dark hair and brown eyes in the village where she was raised. She was called names and labelled as “Gypsy” in the neighborhood, long before she knew what the word meant or had any clue of her background being different from that

of the majority population. The “drill cake” of Dimitrinka, which she had also made especially for Adele during our visit, had left unforgettable memories in her soul, hungry for love and acceptance.

My observation from more than 20 years of membership in a Finnish Pentecostal church is that, while deprivation and disorganization are clearly not sufficient to explain the phenomenon of conversion, they continue to play an important role in the spread of the movement. I would argue that not less than 95% of the people I have seen being baptized during this period were either children of Pentecostals, or people in a difficult life situation, seeking divine help. When children of Pentecostals are baptized, an anthropologist can see this as a “ritual of rupture” as they make a public commitment in front of the whole congregation. The question of conversion, on the other hand, is somewhat unclear, since many of them have been “practicing believers” from their early childhood.

Deprivation and disorganization most probably played an essential role in my own conversion as well. I have been interested in knowing God and talking/praying to Him since my early childhood for as long as I remember. I was raised in a communist country where believing in God was punishable, and taught by my parents that only lowly and ignorant people believed in God. Nevertheless, I wished that He did somehow exist, probably partly because both of my grandmothers occasionally talked about God in secret. In my childhood I used to talk to God every now and again, just in case He might exist and hear me. When I moved to Finland to study in 1990, in the midst of the country’s worst financial crisis, I found myself in a considerable personal crisis as well. My social status was severely affected by becoming an immigrant. From an academically educated member of a renowned and respected family in Bulgaria, overnight I turned into “Miss Nobody” from East Europe, who could not write or say anything correctly enough to sound like an educated person. Finding a job to support my studies proved to be extremely difficult. I filed more than 70 job applications, getting only a few responses, all of which were negative and some of them degrading and offensive. The crisis in Bulgaria after the fall of the Iron

Curtain was so severe that going back was not an option. In the midst of this hardship, I prayed to God and got what I regarded as clear prayer answers. Out of gratitude, I wanted to serve Him, and that was when I met a few Pentecostals, who instructed me in their way of practicing Christianity.

Carsten, Day and Stafford (2018:10) suggest that the earlier biographies of ethnographers make them receptive to specific types of encounters and thus affect their “susceptibility of recognition”. It can be argued that my previous experience of a period of my life facing deprivation and disorganization, and consequent conversion to Pentecostalism, has made me more susceptible to recognizing similar conditions in the lives of the participants of my research and made me more sympathetic towards them. Indeed, during fieldwork it was easy but at times also a burden for me to grasp the feelings of informants who had travelled to Finland with the hope of finding employment and financial provision for their families. I could feel the distress that all the hardship connected to immigration and efforts to find one’s place in the new environment caused them, and their desire for hope and security in a divine agent.

The fact that deprivation and disorganization, as well as difficult life situations in general, play an important role in conversion has biblical support. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 1, the Apostle Paul writes “<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.” According to this Bible verse, God calls as members of his church people who are “deprived and disorganized” in the eyes of the surrounding population – people who have low social status and are perceived as foolish rather than wise. That afternoon in the spring of 2014, all of us had very warm recollections from our trip to Bulgaria in the summer of 1995, which had brought us together almost 20 years before and unintentionally provided

an entrance to the field for me. Going to Bulgaria as an interpreter for the Finnish Kale Pentecostal group preaching to Bulgarian Roma, I had no idea that one day I would be conducting research amongst these people. The friendships and acquaintances made during this trip enabled me to enter the field as a researcher during 2014-2015.

In the following section I will discuss how participation in a Pentecostal or Charismatic congregation affects the social status of Roma in Helsinki.

### **3.4 Upwards Social Mobility and Societal Shift towards Democratization**

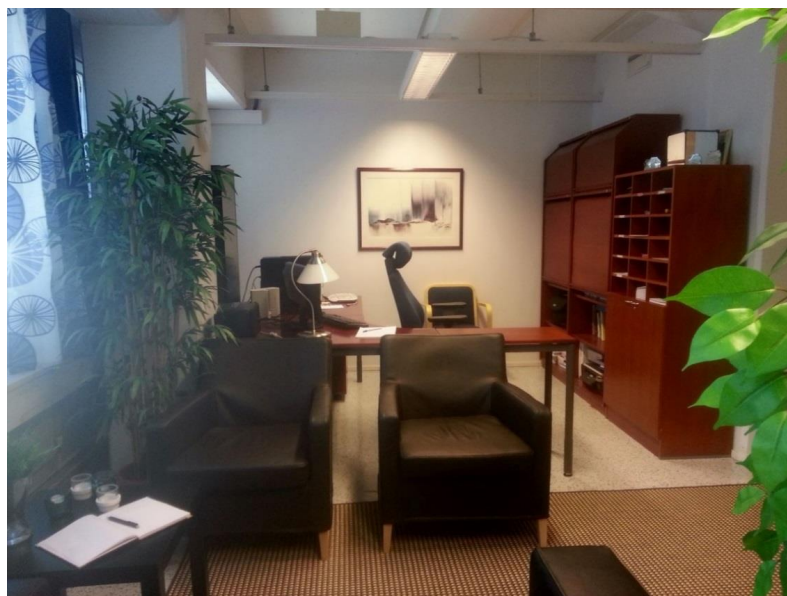
A couple of years after his immigration to Finland, Ivan lost his job as a cleaner at SOL services. Without knowledge of Finnish, English or any other commonly spoken language in Finland, finding his way back into the labour market proved to be a tedious endeavour. Ivan attended all the Finnish language courses provided by the unemployment office but learning a new language at the age of 50+ was difficult for a person with only a few years of education. However, Ivan did his best to find employment. Wherever he went and whenever he met new people, he asked after work. Angelica advised Ivan to apply for a work trial at the National Roma Forum of Finland (NRFF). It turned out that the executive director of NRFF, Armas Lindberg, was a relative of hers, so she was well aware of the opportunities available. NRFF is the Finnish branch of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF). It is an umbrella organization for about 15 (at the time of this study) active Roma NGOs.<sup>15</sup>

Ivan and I visited the Elimäenkatu office of NRFF on 20.5.2014. Back then it was situated in a building in Vallila, part of Helsinki, which had mostly office buildings. To get to the office one had to go through a labyrinth type of corridors, fortunately well equipped with directions. The office itself consisted of a

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<sup>15</sup> Finland's representative and deputy representative to the ERTF Assembly are chosen from the candidates of the member organizations for four years at a time. The purpose of the NRFF is to promote and observe the fulfilment of the basic and civil rights of the Roma population in Finland, as well as to advocate for Roma culture and Roma language.

large room with windows to Elimmäenkatu. The room was separated with a partial wall to form a kitchen and the rest of it was occupied with a large negotiation table, two writing desks and a small sofa corner. The room was decorated with artificial flowers and wall ornaments, making the space feel much cozier than the rest of the building. The day that Ivan and I visited the office of NRFF for the first time, present were the family employed by NRFF Armas and Sanna Lindberg. Sanna was working as a network coordinator. At the time Armas was a substitute for Miranda Vuolasranta, who had taken up a position as an expert official representing Finland at the European Commission Unit on “Non-Discrimination Policies and Roma Coordination”, starting May 2013. Miranda Vuolasranta was the first Roma women to become a high-level public official in Finland and one of the active figures in establishing ERTF in 2004, along with Tarja Halonen, then president of Finland.



**Figure 17 NRFF Office at Elimmäenkatu. April 2014**  
(Picture courtesy of NRFF)



**Figure 18 Ivan being accepted for a work trial at NRFF 8.1.2015**

**In the rear: Armas Lindberg and Ivan Hristov, front: Sanna Lindberg (Photograph Lidia Gripenberg)**

Several of the participants in my research, both Finnish Kale and Bulgarian Roma, were of the opinion that “*turning to Jesus*”, “*being born again*”, and, in connection with it, membership in a Pentecostal congregation is crucial for the upward social mobility and political activation of Roma. Both Miranda Vuolasranta’s and Armas Lindberg’s families are Pentecostals. Miranda Vuolasranta has told me of how, together with other mostly Pentecostal Kale friends in the 1970s, they bought a typewriter and established the first Finnish Kale NGO in Sweden. Armas Lindberg has testified on many occasions about how his “*salvation*” and conversion to Pentecostalism contributed to a complete change in his life from a rebellious young man to an educated Pentecostal preacher and NGO leader.

Researchers of Pentecostalism have denoted the potential of the movement to initiate a societal shift towards democratization. Martin and Comaroff argue that rejection of secular life enables believers to retreat into churches, which act as “protective social capsules” where they can experiment with new

social practices (Robbins 2004b, 117:134; Comaroff 1985:213; Martin and Berger 1991:286-287). This gives them the opportunity to learn new skills in literacy, leadership, oral presentation and organization (Burdick 1996:226; Dodson 1997:34; Marshall 1993:224-225; Martin and Berger 1991:108, 284). Researchers and other professionals working with Finnish Kale in Helsinki are aware that many but not all Finnish Roma activist are Pentecostals. Occasionally there are arguments about whether Roma Pentecostals constitute a closed circle, which promotes its own members, and how balanced their political views are. While the latter might be true in some cases, what I have mostly observed is how Roma members of Pentecostal churches are supported by the majority population parishioners in the process of learning how to function effectively amongst the majority population, which has different cultural traditions. I have witnessed several times in my home church and neighboring churches how Finnish Kale people have joined the church and consequently been supported and instructed by Roma and majority population believers to find education and employment. The egalitarian atmosphere in the church in general, as well as participating in small groups, are for many Kale the first time they enter into close relationships with majority population people. Thus they gain social skills and self-confidence, which they can exploit in other social contexts as well. During fieldwork I encountered several discussions between Bulgarian Roma and Finnish Roma on the pros and cons of establishing purely Roma churches. In Bulgaria it is typical for Roma to form their own independent churches with their own leadership. In Bulgaria there are also considerably more Roma as a percentage of the population than in Finland. Ivan would have been interested in founding a church for Bulgarian immigrants – Roma and non-Roma alike. Most of the Finnish Roma I met were of the opinion that a “mixed church” with members from the majority population of the country fosters upwards social mobility especially for Roma, an opportunity that should not be missed. On the other hand, as pointed out by R.B. Roman (R.

B. Roman 2017:195), Finnish Kale Pentecostals felt ethnicity was not a sufficient reason to form separate churches (R. B. Roman 2017:195).

Armas and Sanna greeted and welcomed Ivan and me in a very friendly manner. We discussed the possibilities regarding Ivan's future job trial. He would be helping NRFF to get in contact with Bulgarian Roma both in Finland and in Bulgaria, as well as with Romanian Roma in Finland. Ivan speaks Romani well and he can also communicate with Romanian Roma. A while later, Angelica and Pirjo Hongisto joined the meeting. Pirjo Hongisto is a Finnish Pentecostal woman, well-known as a volunteer, who has actively supported homeless East European Roma in Helsinki in several ways, among which by providing shelter for them in her home. Her efforts were recognized by the Finnish national media in an article published by YLE<sup>16</sup> news on 26.5.2015. A few days later, however, the municipality of Helsinki approached Ivan with a proposal for 6 months' subsidized work as a housekeeper at one of their Day Centers. As Ivan was approaching 60, he was eligible for such support, but only for that one 6-month period. The work trial at NRFF was postponed, but the cooperation of the Hristov family with NRFF, the Lindberg family, and Angelica continued. Eventually Ivan did complete a 6-month work trial at NRFF in the spring of 2015.

In this example Ivan, who was a relatively new East European Roma migrant in Finland, was able to explore opportunities for upward social mobility through the friendships and acquaintances made in Pentecostal circles. He had got to know some Finnish Pentecostal Kale who visited his home in Bulgaria during an evangelizing trip. They in turn introduced him to other Pentecostal Kale and Roma activists in Finland. In Finland he participated in the evangelizing efforts of Finnish Kale aimed at East European Roma. He thus got to know the people working at NRFF and was offered an opportunity for a 6-month work trial, which is a valuable opportunity for a migrant with very limited language proficiency. While

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<sup>16</sup> YLE is Finland's national public broadcasting company. Finnish state owns 99.98% of it.



working at NRFF, Ivan and Armas Lindberg investigated the possibility of establishing an NGO for East European Roma or specifically Bulgarian Roma, where Ivan could potentially be employed. Establishing an NGO for East European Roma would have been a step in a societal shift towards democratization concerning East European Roma status in Finland.

While it is important to point out how Pentecostalism contributes to the upwards social mobility and societal shift towards democratization in the case of the Roma in Helsinki, the effect of Pentecostalism on the role and position of Roma women deserves to be presented in a separate section.

### **3.5 Position of Women**

When the project Language, Identity and Authenticity among Roma in Eastern Europe was initiated in the spring of 2013, I saw it as an opportunity both to study a subject of interest but also to serve people I cared for through interpretation. Following parental leave, my formal work on the project began in April 2014. In May 2014, Angelica, Ivan and I started planning regular Christian meetings for the East European Roma living on the streets of Helsinki. Angelica is a Finnish Roma woman, in her early thirties at the time. She had converted to Pentecostalism in 2009 and among other things had travelled to attend Bible College in Uganda in 2011-2012 all by herself. Studies on Pentecostalism have depicted the role of Pentecostalism in the empowerment of women for participation both in church and the secular public sphere. As the churches acknowledge two types of authority, “institutional and inspirational” (Cucchiari 1990:693-694; Robbins 2004b:132), men occupy predominantly institutional positions. Under the influence of the Spirit, women may serve as prophets, evangelist, preachers, etc. Angelica had shown considerable courage in travelling to Uganda alone. For a woman in the Finnish Kale community, acting so independently was exceptional. She also had a strong zeal to bring the Gospel to all people, but most of all to poor and marginalized Roma. I became acquainted with Angelica in the summer of 2013 at the Pentecostal Church in a northwest suburb of Helsinki. We had first met a couple of years earlier at a

Roma youth Christian home prayer meeting where Ivan had been invited to minister. Earlier research indicates that participation in prayer groups provides women living in communities upholding patriarchal cultural traditions (such as Finnish Kale) with the opportunity to establish new relationships outside their kin and in many cases to acquire leadership skills (Robbins 2004b:132; S. Hunt 2002:159; P. J. Stewart and Strathern 2001:100). At Myyrmäki, Angelica and her friend Ramona (pseudonym), also a Finnish Roma, organized evangelical meetings, accompanied by a tea and coffee break with freshly baked pastry, for the East European Roma dwelling on the streets of the Helsinki region. I knew Ramona from when I worked at Kaalo Day Center and she was there as a trainee. Ramona had recalled that I had a Bulgarian Roma Pentecostal pastor friend (Ivan) and had come up with the idea to invite him to preach to the East European Roma in Roma language. As we got to know each other, Angelica and Ivan started to plan evangelizing activities together.

In my understanding Angelica had gained confidence, social skills and eventually leadership skills through converting to Pentecostalism, participating in the life of the congregation and attending prayer groups. She practised being independent by travelling to Uganda for a two-year Bible College by herself. Later, she practised leadership skills by arranging evangelizing events for East European Roma together with Ramona. At the time of my fieldwork, she was one of the initiators for the evangelizing meetings organized by NRFF. She was also politically active, making a speech to address the then Minister of Internal Affairs Päivi Räsänen in connection with International Roma Day 8.4.2015. Angelica is one example how Pentecostalism can help a woman change her position within her community. In general, political activism is not popular amongst Finnish Kale. Most of the Pentecostal Roma women I know are not as politically active as Angelica, nevertheless for most of them conversion has affected their position in the community.

Converting to Pentecostalism has contributed to the empowerment of women, positive development in general and upward social mobility in the life of several of the participants of the research and their families. Nevertheless, abiding by the moral code and social life rules brought about by conversion also posed challenges to the social relations of converts. I will address those challenges in the following section.

### **3.6 Complex Relationship of Pentecostalism with Traditional Cultural Practices**

Ivan and his wife Dimitrinka, together with his son Nasko and daughter in law Biljana, visited Armas and Sanna Lindberg's home in Espoo in the autumn of 2014. My family was also invited. Sanna had prepared a nice dinner of baked salmon, boiled potatoes and salad, followed by dessert. The tenor of the evening was nice and relaxed. Ivan was extremely eager to get Armas and Sanna visit Bulgaria and become family friends with them. He was constantly trying to push the conversation so that the Lindbergs would at least half promise to visit Bulgaria.

They discussed food in Bulgaria and in Finland. Ivan asked whether the hosts were afraid of going to Bulgaria and what their worries were. The Lindbergs explained that they were not afraid but they travel so much in Finland for their work that they prefer to stay home during vacations. They told us about their occupation and the fact that they had given their life to Jesus and Jesus was "*leading them and using them*". At the time their contract in NRFF was only until 30.4.2014 and they did not know whether Miranda Vuolasranta would be returning to her position or continuing her assignment in Brussels. Ivan commented that the Armas' lives were also quite uncertain. Armas stated that he was not afraid, since Jesus was leading him and following God's will is the safest place for a human. He told about his coming to faith at the age of 17, after a restless and violent youth, being stabbed 12 times, sometimes almost fatally.



**Figure 19 Visit to the Lindberg home in Espoo on 2.10.2014**

**From left: Biljana, Nasko, Dimitrinka, Sanna, Armas with their son and Lidia on the balcony of Lindberg**

I commented that probably he had been like the young Finnish Roma people at Kaalo Day Centre, but he replied that he had not used drugs. He had been a rebellious, angry young man, who hated the majority population with his entire heart. When he was 7 years old a Finnish gang had destroyed his parents' home, the only reason being that they were Roma. Since then he had hated Finnish people. However, later God saved him and gave him a new heart and a Finnish majority population wife with whom he had 6 children. All of us concluded that God certainly has a sense of humor, as He gave Armas a wife from the midst of the people he had hated most as a youngster. Armas and his two sisters became Christians first, then his parents and brothers were also converted. Later his brothers lost their faith, but Armas gave his whole heart and life to Jesus.

About 21.30 my husband and our son left for home and I stayed with the rest of the people at Armas' home. The discussion went on, touching on how Bulgarian Roma settle disputes and whether they take revenge on each other when grievously wronged. Biljana and Nasko explained that it has been an old custom to take revenge (usually on the person or their close family only), which is nowadays practiced mostly in the *mahalas* (parts of the towns inhabited mainly by minority groups) but not by Roma settled among the Bulgarian population. However, in the church Roma forgive each other and old enemies become friends. Nasko and Biljana said that among one of the distinct Roma groups living in their region, the *Kalaidzii*, it is their self-government that decides on such disputes and usually the guilty person has to pay a few thousand leva (Bulgarian currency BGN, the value of which at the time was about 0.50 Euro) to the one injured. Then the issue is settled. Bulgarian (*dasikane*) Roma however do not practise self-government. Armas commented that in the olden times the Finnish Roma also had "*wise old men*" who dispensed justice and settled disputes, but this is no longer practiced. Before, the guilty person could be exiled from their family, and thus the family was considered no longer guilty. Armas continued that the principle of avoidance is still strongly practiced amongst Finnish Kale. That makes it difficult for believers, since they are conscious not to be in contact with "*sopimattomia*" ("*inappropriate*" – that which is to be avoided) because they do not want to hurt their family members and elders. That makes even arranging church meetings complicated and "in the end it's usually mostly the same people who attend the meetings," he concluded.

In this last passage we can see an example of what Robbins calls the "complex relationship of Pentecostalism with traditional cultures", a relationship of both preservation and rejection, which Dombrowski (2001) calls culture "against culture". (Dombrowski 2001:182-183; Robbins 2004b:137) Finnish Kale Pentecostals easily find themselves caught up in a conflict of loyalties. On one hand Pentecostal Christian ethics calls for forgiveness and the renunciation of feuds. That would mean that

old enemies could attend the same events organized by a congregation. On the other hand, the tradition of showing respect for one's family members, and especially elders, demands that they avoid a person (or members of his kin group) who has caused significant harm to a member of their kin group (Berlin 2015:155). In my experience, these situations are frequently misunderstood by the main population. When a Pentecostal Finnish Roma demands avoidance from the "guilty side" by, for example, declaring in one way or another "you are not welcome in our church", in most of the cases I have seen, the issue is not feuding but reverence towards one's own family. Over the years I have witnessed several instances of the avoidance principle operating in my home church. I have seen newcomers being told that it is not appropriate for them to attend a particular church because of past conflicts. I have had people tell me that they cannot visit a specific church, because of the respect and compassion they feel towards the members of a family that had suffered in a past conflict. I have seen people striving "*to follow Jesus*" and "*forgive and forget*" in order to overcome these restrictions and worrying that by doing so they may be offending the elders of their family.

While conversion to Pentecostalism often brings positive development in the life of the participants of my research in terms of empowerment, upwards social mobility and a shift towards democratization, it also adds to the complexity of their social relationships. Here I have described one of the most obvious ways in which the demands placed by Kale and some other Roma groups' cultural traditions on individuals clash with the conduct expected of a Pentecostal convert. Breaking the rules of traditional cultural norms involves a social cost. Bearing this in mind, in the next section I will address the issue of whether fulfilling personal needs is a sufficient explanation of the role that religious conversion plays in the life of converts.

### **3.7 Religious Conversion is More than Means for Fulfilling a Person's Needs**

Armas had arranged for Ivan to preach at a Roma gathering in one of the suburbs of the metropolitan area in the autumn of 2014. My guess is that, since this happened to be the autumn vacation week for schoolchildren in Espoo, Armas asked Ivan to be his substitute while he was on vacation with his family. In any case, this showed that already Armas trusted Ivan so much as to let him preach without being personally present. The gathering was organized in a “kerhohuone” (club room) of an apartment building in one of the suburbs and thus it was a bit hard to find. I found the area but finding the exact address was difficult, because there were no real streets but rather walking paths in this area. I was searching for the street address when Ivan called me – he had looked through the window of a building and seen Roma people gathered. Had he not done this, we would have probably wondered for quite a while still and been late. At that gathering there were 10-20 men and fewer than 10 women. They had gathered to pray and sing and, as I understood, occasionally receive some Bible teaching. Before the beginning of the official part, Ivan spoke with an older Finnish Roma man who seemed to speak Romani quite well. I asked if they would need an interpreter but Ivan replied that they were managing well in Romani and some Finnish. After that, Ivan held a sermon on the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-9) and the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).

Both of these parables address how different people react to the message of the Gospel. In the parable of the sower Jesus describes a sower whose seeds fell on different ground. Some fell along the path and the birds ate them. Some fell on a rocky place with shallow soil, they sprang up quickly but as the sun shone they withered because they had no roots. Some fell among thorns which grew up and choked them. Others fell in good soil and produced an abundant crop. The different places signify different types of people. Some (places along the path) are not at all receptive to the message of the Gospel, some (the rocky place) accept it quickly but when trouble or persecution arises they turn away because they have

no roots. For some (the thorny place) the worries of life and the desire for wealth makes the message unfruitful in their lives. The good soil signifies people who accept the Gospel message and follow it.

In the parable of the virgins the five foolish ones did not have any extra oil for their lamps, whereas the five wise ones had stocked up extra oil. While they were waiting for the groom to come, the oil of the foolish ones ran out and eventually they were left out from the wedding feast. The foolish virgins signify people who call themselves Christian but do not practise their faith diligently so as to have a supply of spiritual strength. When Jesus returns these people are expected to be left out of His kingdom. Ivan gave practical illustrations, using a bit of drama. He played the role of a man who had just been to a church meeting but from there headed to the bar, smoking and drinking alcohol and lusting after women. He said that there are people who call themselves Christians but when they go out of church, they smoke, go to pubs, drink alcohol and lust. They listen to the sermons at the meetings, but they do not live their lives for God; rather they do business, cheat people and indulge themselves with the pleasures of the world. In my understanding, Ivan's purpose was to encourage people to consider how they live their daily lives as Christians. Are their attitudes in line with the Christian teaching they receive and is their life style consistent in church and everyday situations outside the church? He preached for quite a while (not less than 40 min) but most of the people seemed to be eager to hear what he had to say. He also told them honestly that he had forgotten about the meeting and was a bit frightened about how he would manage when he got to hear about it about 4 hours beforehand. They laughed but concluded that it was all right, God helped and gave Ivan the words that they needed to hear. Ivan said that he hoped to come to this gathering again and most of the people seemed quite positive about it.

Towards the end of the meeting, Jasmin and Amelia (pseudonyms) together with Emilia and Diljan (Bulgarian Roma, pseudonyms), entered the room. Jasmin was a Finnish Kale woman I knew relatively well from when I worked at the Diaconia Institute. At the time she seemed to be about 50. Estimating



the age of people at “low threshold” Day Centres is often not simple. Many of them have lived a harsh life; in addition, an instructor is expected to ask as few questions as possible, especially personal ones. I remember the first time I met Jasmin I was a bit frightened, since I perceived her behaviour as somewhat aggressive. Later, I learned that she was actually a fairly tenderhearted and compassionate person, whose style of communication was influenced by a difficult past. She had lost both of her parents in a car accident at the age of 13. In her youth, Jasmin ended up living on the streets of Helsinki and eventually got involved with drugs, which unsurprisingly brought about mental health issues. Some years before we met, Jasmin had by chance dropped in at a gathering of the Missionary Church (*Lähetysseurakunta*), a Pentecostal church situated in the Center of Helsinki. “*En mä ajattellut tulla uskoon,*” (“*I didn’t mean to come to faith*”) she noted, while telling her story. It so happened that the people at the meeting asked her permission to pray for her and upon her agreement they interceded before God for her. To Jasmin’s amazement, and that of many others, including her intercessors, I imagine, the next day she reported that her desire for drugs was gone. This continued for several days in a row. After some time she decided to visit the church again and that time “*gave her heart to Jesus*”, which essentially changed her life.

Jasmin’s conversion provides an opportunity to contemplate the argument of Coleman and Hackett (2015) on to what extent religious conversion can be explained by recognizing the role it plays in fulfilling a person’s needs (Coleman and Hackett 2015:28-29) and finding a new identity as characteristic for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity conversion, centred around the notion of becoming a “child of God” (Burdick 2013; Robbins 1998). In her study on Pentecostal Slovakian Roma, Podolinska also suggests that the classic theory of deprivation fails to explain why the people she worked with had converted. In her view, in the context of Slovakia, for Roma becoming Pentecostal adds a religious stigma to an already existing ethnic one and conversion should be seen primarily as a way of fulfilling religious needs (Podolinská 2014:106-107). While it is evident that the “preconditions” of deprivation and

disorganization, poverty and psychological trauma had made Jasmin susceptible to accepting the assistance of a close-knit and caring, egalitarian Pentecostal community were well fulfilled, an observer may suspect that there were additional factors/agents. According to her testimony, she had no goals or intentions in dropping by in that meeting. It is commonly known that long-term dependency on drugs is a serious condition, which is difficult to change even with the best of will and efforts of the person affected by it. She felt that it was Jesus who had liberated her from the dependency and the "*Pyhän Hengen kosketus*" ("*touch of the Holy Spirit*") that had altered her life situation. After this she had the freedom to choose, whether to get further engaged with this divine agent or continue her life on her own terms. Since Jasmin experienced this change in connection with an event of the Pentecostal church, it was natural that she returned to that church and gradually accepted its doctrines. However, it is important to note that the social environment in the church was potentially not defined solely by divine actions.

Once a wanderer, at the time we met Jasmin was living a modest but honest life, inhabiting a nicely furnished two-room apartment together with an elder Finnish sister in the faith, Amelia, whom she called "*Äiti*" ("Mommy"). In doing so Jasmin was crossing rigid social borders. The word "Mother" is not used by Finnish Roma, because it is considered to distantly refer to issues associated with childbirth and sexuality (Viljanen, Hagert, and Blomerus 2007) and is thus shameful. Calling someone of the majority population "Mommy" was even more unheard of.

That evening Jasmin was surprised but happy to see me. I got to know Emilia and Dilijan, who were then living at Jasmin's place. Emilia was working at an ethnic restaurant, where she was clearly exploited by working many more hours than defined in the contract but being paid only according to the hours stated in the contract. I told her that unfortunately new immigrants were often abused in this way, even in Finland. She should be patient and wait to get her registration and social security card, and then she could search for another job. Dilijan told me a sad and scary story of how they had been robbed by criminals

called *lihvari* (usurers) their home town of Vidin in Bulgaria. The family had a house and a shop but everything was taken or destroyed and they were left penniless and homeless. I checked later on the Internet and found Bulgarian police reports on this gang in the Roma quarters of Northwest Bulgaria. After one and a half years of social work at the Diaconia Institute, I had learned that it was good to listen to all stories and that time would shed more light on the events.

During fieldwork I had the opportunity to follow one conversion story closely. Radostin and Milena, the couple I introduced earlier and who had migrated to Finland in order to avoid the turmoil their relationship had caused among relatives and friends, became frequent visitors to the evangelizing meetings organized by the NRFF. The meetings in general had varied attendance. Sometimes up to 20 people would be present but sometimes there would only be a couple of attendees. That kind of variation was to be expected, since all of the attendees were living in precarious conditions. Different groups kept coming from and going to Bulgaria and Romania. People were also travelling inside Finland, especially when the summer festival period began. The summer festivals were considered to be the best opportunity to make money by gathering and returning cans. Radostin and Milena, however, proved to be faithful participants in the evangelizing events not only at Green Oasis, which was conveniently situated near Hirundo, but also at weekly and monthly gatherings of Finnish Roma Pentecostal gatherings in different locations around the metropolitan area.

That day, 20.1.2015, there was a gathering at Green Oasis at 4pm. At about 3pm Milena and I went to the premises to prepare the sandwiches and coffee. Milena's help was invaluable and we managed to do the job quickly although the kitchen was new to us. At the start of the meeting there were Sami and Kyösti (the evangelists), Angelica, Jussi Ärling and his wife Mirjami Hagert, Ivan, Hristo, Radostin, Milena, one Finnish non-Roma woman, one Romanian Roma man and one Romanian non-Roma man. Jussi and Mirjami were a middle-aged Finnish Kale couple who had lived more than 10 years in Sweden

working and actively volunteering in their local Pentecostal congregation in Eskilstuna, but had recently migrated back to Finland and settled close to my home in Espoo. I translated into Bulgarian and Angelica into English for the Romanian people. Kyösti and Sami sang songs both in Finnish and Romani. Each of them made a short speech and the main message was that Roma are simple and uneducated people but that was fine since the message of the Gospel is simple and God loves simple people. Sami's sermon was constructed around the Biblical story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was a sinful man, a tax collector who used to cheat people. He was also a small man, a fact often mentioned in Bible teaching to point out that one does not need to be "big" or remarkable in the eyes of people to be noticed by God. Jesus saw the heart of Zacchaeus and called him by name. Sami's message was that God knows our hearts and knows us and calls us by name, even if we are insignificant and sinful in people's eyes. Sami witnessed that sometimes in a prayer God has told him the given name of a person he was praying for, even though Sami himself knew this person only by nickname. The message clearly touched Radostin, but even closer to his heart came the witnessing of Mirjami and Jussi, especially Jussi's testimony. Mirjami said that she had been a believer since she was a young girl, but she had not automatically learned to know Jesus and communicate with Him. That had come through prayer and reading the Bible and searching for God's help in the difficult situations in life. Jussi said that he had been with his family in Sweden for 11 years but never learned Swedish.

*"So," he concluded, "I am a person to whom messages don't easily come across. Nevertheless, God spoke clearly to me one day. The situation was such that our family was in a real trouble. We had lost everything and all we had was broken down. By the way, I am a person who has a tendency to get our family in trouble. So in this situation I was asked to lead a meeting in our church and I refused...I had nothing to say. Then I was in the gym, taking shower after exercise ... with shampoo on my head (he mimicked). And then*

*I heard a voice, "Jussi," but there was no one around and I thought I had misheard. "Jussi", said the voice once again, "Go to start the meeting and I will bless you." I obeyed and went to the meeting. After that matters gradually started to get better in our life and God really blessed me." "Another time I was at the stable," Jussi said. "I was taking care of the horses. That morning I didn't have strength and there was a lot to do. I pleaded to God: please help me. I started doing my job and before I even noticed everything was done, very fast. When the others came they were surprised as well." Diary 20.1.2015*

Even though there were not many people at the meeting, the atmosphere was very good, warm, friendly and cheerful. At the end Sami asked Ivan to pray and I translated into Finnish. We also had sandwiches and coffee together before we left. Jussi and Mirjami took me home and we talked in the car. They told me that they would be very glad to help in this work and asked when the following meeting would be. They were interested in getting to know as much as possible about the people who had attended the meeting. A few days later, while formally interviewing Radostin, I realized just how deeply Jussi's testimony had touched him. At the end of the interview he looked somewhat shyly at me and said, "You know, Lidia, I would also like to clean someone's stable someday." His eyes were filled with tears as he tried to joke but he could hardly hide his emotion. "What do you mean?" I asked, somewhat dismayed. "I mean I want to be with the Lord, just like Jussi. Maybe someday still..." he concluded.

A couple of weeks later, Jussi came by car to get Milena, Radostin and me from the railway station to a weekly prayer and Bible teaching meeting of Finnish Kale, organized in the clubroom of an apartment building on the outskirts of the metropolitan area. Kyösti L was preaching that evening. Kyösti had a very touching sermon based on his own life experience. He spoke about his family tragedy, which had been covered by Finnish media at the time. He and his wife had prayed for their grown-up child for four years and then they received an answer. The situation was resolved but not without irreparable

consequences. Kyösti was crying and preaching that God may allow us to be broken and crushed and reduced to nothing, but He is with us and will not forsake us in these moments.

*Radostin cried all through the sermon, soaking a large napkin with tears. I could clearly see that the Holy Spirit touched him and this short but tough man became as soft and tender as a small child. After the sermon, Kyösti came and asked Radostin whether he would like to give his life to Christ. Radostin accepted and Kyösti led him through the prayer of repentance. I translated. After Radostin, Milena also prayed the prayer of repentance but not so emotionally. Diary 2.2.2015*

During the coffee break after the meeting, Radostin chatted with an older man called Terno. Terno means “young” in Romanes, so they were laughing. Radostin was very pleased that Terno spoke Romani so well that they could chat together. On our way home, Milena and Radostin received a Bulgarian Bible. While in the car, Jussi offered Radostin a CD of Jouni Åkerlund (a famous Finnish Kale Pentecostal singer) and 20 euro to help. Radostin hesitated before accepting. He said that he was not in great need at the moment but he could ask for the money when he was in need. Jussi replied that he might not have the money at that moment, so Radostin accepted the money. He promised to pay it back when he was better off. Earlier, when I had tried to offer Radostin the Joni Åkerlund CD, he had refused. Radostin adored Joni’s singing.

In Charismatic movements, when the Holy Spirit touches a person, there are specific consequences for the person’s life. I could only witness and record one conversion during my fieldwork, but I had seen several before. Most often the “new-born believer” acquires a “*new heart*”, a new inner moral code that is not dictated by the environment. This was also the case with Radostin. Approximately a month later, I paid a short visit to Hirundo. I had been asked by NRFF to bring an advertisement for the Finnish Kale Pentecostal gathering taking place the following Sunday. There I met Radostin and he told me that he

had been in some trouble. He had been insulted by someone (Bulgarian Roma) and hit him in return. Radostin was sincerely sorry about it and was ashamed. He said that he did not want to be the “*old man*” he was before accepting Jesus. He said that he was good at fighting but he did not want to do it any more. He and Milena had also had some trouble with Bulgarian Roma newcomers. Some other family was trying to push Milena away from selling magazines at Kamppi. This time, however, Radostin did not want to fight, but trust in God. “Before, I knew how to deal with these situations,” he said, “...but now I don’t want to do that anymore...” He also mentioned that the centre of Helsinki is divided between Romanian and Bulgarian Roma.

Many Roma groups have a tradition of dividing the territory where they practise economic activities (Berlin 2015:156; Solimene 2011:643) like begging or selling newspapers or other goods. In my experience, most of the time the borders of these divisions are peacefully respected. Nevertheless, at times they may be contested, which eventually leads to confrontation. Refraining from using physical force in these instances would place a person in an extremely vulnerable position. Radostin and Milena were inhabiting an illegal settlement and earning a living by selling newspapers and collecting cans. Radostin’s decision to give up fighting made their life even more precarious. My point here is that, while Pentecostal conversion plays a role in fulfilling a person’s needs, mostly social and psychological, a genuine conversion may and often does also involve a cost. Sometimes the cost can be very high. Later events backed up the understanding that Radostin was touched by a divine agent, the Holy Spirit, during the Pentecostal gathering of Finnish Kale. Radostin was willing to pay the price of the demands placed on him by his new inner moral code. No one from the outside had placed such demands on him. By this I mean that the Pentecostals who were in close contact with the couple at the time understood the seriousness of the situation and did not dare share an opinion on what should be done or left undone. People quietly stated that they would pray for them and tried to avoid discussing the topic further.

Fortunately, the conflict eventually came to a peaceful resolution. An elder man from the recently arrived Bulgarian Roma family defended Milena and she could continue her work undisturbed. Radostin and Milena interpreted that as a prayer answer.

As stated by Coleman and Hackett (2015:28-29), many ethnographers tend to assume that religious conversion can be “explained” by identifying its role in addressing the person’s more fundamental issues, such as lack of direction in life, poverty, need for healing or psychological trauma. My argument is that while conversion undeniably plays such a role in people’s lives, there are additional factors which are essential to better understanding the process and outcome of conversion. The experience of the participants of my research was of a spiritual encounter that influenced their life and resulted in their obtaining a new identity, as characterized by Burdick and Robbins (Burdick 2013; Robbins 1998), of a person with a new internal moral code, “a *new heart*”. That was for example the case of Jasmin, who experienced a change in her life she had neither anticipated nor aimed for. While fulfilling personal needs, conversion brings new moral principles, some of which could even challenge the basic needs of the convert. Such was the case of Radostin, who decided to refrain from using physical force to protect himself and his girlfriend while still living and earning their income on the streets of Helsinki. In order to address the spiritual component in studying conversion, in the next section I will discuss different ways of generation knowledge during fieldwork.

### **3.8 Different Ways of Generating Knowledge and the Relationship of Anthropology and Theology**

In this section I will address the ambiguity connected with describing and analyzing religious experiences. I will elaborate on two sides of the issue. The first is how a researcher generates knowledge. The second is how different disciplines traditionally analyze religious experiences, in this case anthropology as opposed to theology. Participant observation is commonly recognized as the most



common research method in anthropology. In participant observation the researcher uses his/her senses, social skills and previously accommodated knowledge to assess and describe a given fieldwork situation. He/she reports what he/she has seen, heard and felt as the atmosphere of a given event in accordance with the information obtained about the surrounding circumstances of the studied community and with personal life experience. In the case of religious events, however, there is an additional dimension, the spiritual realm, which is not usually addressed in mundane situations of the Western world. That makes the realistic reproduction of social reality within the scholarly report even more challenging. Likely for this reason, Engelke (2002:6,8), referring to Evans-Pitchard and Victor Turner, asserts that grasping the whole picture about religion with purely academic methods is virtually impossible. In such cases Engelke (2002:8) argues that the researcher's inner life may "provide a key to explaining the inner lives of others." My personal view is that while using this kind of key may provide valuable insights for interpreting a given situation, it should be done with great care and only in combination with other traditional methods. What this means for the current study is that my long personal involvement with Christianity, both Pentecostal and Lutheran, provides some clue to assessing spiritual reality. Given the insecurities associated with such type of assessment I will resort to it only when necessary and always in combination with other types of observations. The following is a tragicomic example of an attempt to discern the nature of a spiritual experience.

Emotional outbursts in connection with religious gatherings attract the attention of the observer but their meaning might be correctly understood only after a longer period of time. Here I describe a case from the late 1990s, when I was visiting Bulgarian Roma Pentecostal churches together with Finnish Kale Pentecostals, serving as an interpreter. During one such visit there had been a day with several events and a busy programme. I had been interpreting the entire day, also during lunch and dinner, which hardly gave me a chance to eat. In the evening there was a closing prayer moment, during which I burst into

tears from exhaustion and bitterness. I couldn't understand how those preachers, who had been professing God's love throughout the day, had no understanding or compassion for an interpreter as a human being. As my face was covered with tears, one of the members of the congregation we were visiting came to me and patted me on the shoulder, saying, "*It is so good that the Holy Spirit touched our sister.*" Even though we had spent several days in Pentecostal gatherings, in my view this particular event had nothing to do with spirituality. It was a casual social encounter with its mundane controversies.

The second issue relevant to the description of religious events in this study is the relationship between anthropology and theology as described in scholarly literature. According to Hoffstaedter (2013:277), anthropology and theology are similar in that both study the nature of external forces "that make us human", focusing respectively on society and culture, and divine phenomena. Theology describes and analyzes religious experiences, while anthropology's goal is to interpret theoretically the life experience of particular communities. The experiences of informants constitute the bases of both disciplines; the major difference is the preconception of existence of God. Theologians tend to assume that God is an existing agent in religious experience, whereas anthropologists tend to presume that God does not exist and study the reported experiences of informants (Davies 2002:1). It is probably more correct to say that the position of anthropology as a discipline is to assume that there is no single answer to the question of the existence of God, nor is it the task of anthropology to answer it. The task of anthropologists studying religion is to understand how others experience God or other forms of spiritual experience.

Morton (2013) argues that both anthropology and religion are "moral(izing) projects" aiming to offer satisfaction to their followers in order to ensure their future engagement. Thus anthropologists have their own proselytizing message to spread (Morton 2013:237; Haddon 2013:253). Reading anthropological studies on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity communities, how scholars deal with the "stories of conversion" or "testimonies" of informants came to my attention. Scholars tend to analyze the

sociocultural consequences or prerequisites of conversion but shy away from viewing conversion and its outcomes as a spiritual experience. As an example, I would mention the ethnography of Gay y Blasco (1999) on Gitanos in Madrid. Describing the social organization of the neighbourhood she studied, she writes about the *Aleluyas*, members of the local Pentecostal congregation: “*They readily provide stories about men forgiving the killers of their fathers, sons or brothers after converting to Evangelism, or about life-long enemies embracing after accidentally meeting at a service.*” (Gay y Blasco 1999:54). The analysis of this phenomenon is presented in the study in sociocultural terms, explaining that local Evangelical preachers have “reformulated Gypsiness” with the central idea of rejecting feuding as a way of handling conflicts.

Building a new Religio-Roma Identity, as conceptualised by Gyietvai and Delavi (2016:46) in their study of the Roma Revival Movement in Hungary, through a transformation from “bad” to “good” Gypsy is an undeniable characteristic of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity Roma revivals. More than 20 years of friendship, social work and finally anthropological research among Finnish Kale, for whom feuding and avoidance are known cultural practices (Grönfors 1977; Berlin 2015:155-157; Thurfjell 2014:167), have convinced me that the abrupt life transformations I have witnessed and heard about over these years are understood and described by informants as a result of spiritual experience combined with the impact of the social conditions. The life testimony of the executive director of NRFF, Armas Lindberg is one example.

The regular Roma meeting in Eastern Helsinki was held on 8.3.2015 at 2pm. There were at least 60 Finnish Roma present, mostly middle-aged and older people and young families with children. There were also five Bulgarian Roma present, among them Radostin, Milena and Ivan. Ivan introduced the meeting. His message was that we all need to revise our hearts and our lives with respect to the teachings of the Bible. Ivan’s speech was very zealous. After him came Armas, who said that he had planned to

speaking on a different subject but the Holy Spirit had prompted him to continue on the same theme after he heard Ivan. His speech was so vehement that Radostin was startled. He told me, *“I have never seen Armas so aggravated, has something happened?”* Armas stressed forgiveness and mercy. His point was that Roma believers often misuse God’s mercy and grace as an excuse to continue sinning. During the public discussion part of the meeting Kyösti (a Finnish Kale man) asked, *“When is it then, where we need God’s grace?”* Armas replied, *“I needed God’s grace at the moment when I sat at the same coffee table with the man who had stabbed me 12 times with a knife and I barely survived. I needed God’s grace to tell this man that I have forgiven him!”*

I explained to Radostin that the reason Armas was so aggravated was the attitude of unforgiveness he had encountered in his brethren. I told him that in practice it meant that many people could not even attend church. Later during the break, Radostin told me that blood feud used to be practised among his Roma group (*Kardarashi*) as well. He told me that in his hometown in Bulgaria a bride had been engaged and paid for but she eloped with another man before the wedding. The whole family, including more distant relatives of the man who “stole” the bride, had to move out of the town. Radostin was a member of the hurt family. 20 years later, the elder of the avoiding family risked his life (*“Буквално си сложи главата в торбата”*) and came to visit the elder of Radostin’s family and ask for forgiveness. The two old men managed to come to an agreement and the exiled family returned. Radostin said that blood feud and avoidance were not so common among their group any more.

The Roma in Helsinki with whom I worked were highly spiritual and experienced deeply spiritual moments that transformed their lives. The last example also shows that the same end result, in this case abandoning feuding, could in their view be an outcome of a sudden transformation following a religious/spiritual experience or a gradual societal shift. Armas was able to forgive and face his attacker as a result of a spiritual experience, whereas Radostin’s community was gradually shifting away from

the practice of feuding. In the previous sections I have discussed different aspects of Pentecostal conversion described in anthropological research literature and how they have influenced the life of the Roma in Helsinki whom I studied. In the following section I will move on to analyzing how Pentecostalism appeared to work as a factor triggering integration between Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Helsinki.

### **3.9 Pentecostalism as a Trigger for Interaction**

As seen in the previous chapter, conversion to Pentecostalism can be approached through the arguments of deprivation and displacement (R. M. Anderson 1979:235; D'Epinay 1969; E. Willems 1967:63) and recognizing the role conversion plays in fulfilling person's needs (Coleman and Hackett 2015:28-29). As described by R.B. Roman (2017), religious conversion is not always a unidirectional process and converts may fluctuate "in and out of faith" (R. B. Roman 2017:173-175). The experience of the informants of the current research was that genuine conversion was always associated with the perceived influence of a divine agent, "*the touch of the Holy Spirit*", and acquiring a new inner moral code, a "*new heart*". This was supplemented by spiritual exercises (reading the Bible, listening to sermons, prayer, etc.) All of this together, the spiritual experience of an encounter with a divine agent "*the Holy Spirit*" plus the teaching and social practices of the congregations people were involved with resulted in a desire to evangelize, "*kertoa Jeesuksesta*" ("tell about Jesus"), to as many people as possible in accordance with the urge presented in several parts of the New Testament, e.g. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" Math 18:19. Converts were encouraged to address their fellow men first and foremost. In fieldwork settings, these were the factors resulting in "the strong boundary-breaking tendency of Pentecostalism" described by Coleman and Hackett (2015:15).

Robbins (2011) argues that the very high degree of ritual activity characteristic of the social life of Pentecostals is the key factor enabling the rapid global spread of Pentecostalism and its ability to build resilient institutions in the midst of harsh social conditions. He sees the same factor as responsible for the apparent ease with which Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. A high degree of involvement in ritual practices is typical of Pentecostal social life—regular participation in Sunday God services, Bible studies and prayer groups and voluntary work, resulting in believers being engaged in church activities several times a week (Robbins 2011:50-53).

Robbins (2011:57-62) draws on Collins's (2004:44) theory that all successful human interaction that is sufficiently ritualised produces a kind of “emotional energy”, which human beings seek. According to Collins (2004), along their lifespan, people tend to seek participation in as many successful interaction rituals as possible, increasing their store of emotional energy. Robbins (2011:58) suggests that Pentecostals everywhere share a set of bodily practices, such as laying hands in prayer, lifting arms in worship, and speaking in tongues, which allows them to produce a substantial amount of emotional energy, which in turn keeps people involved in church activities. In addition, successful ritual practices build bridges of trust across the barriers of disagreement and lack of shared linguistic and cultural comprehension. In the case of the Roma in Helsinki, it was apparent that the familiar Pentecostal ritual practices were a part of the process of building bridges of trust between Roma groups and individuals, who otherwise shared fairly limited linguistic and cultural comprehension.

The tendency of Roma Pentecostal movement to act as a uniting factor between different Gypsy groups has been described by several authors (Gay y Blasco 2002; Delgado 2010; Slavkova 2014; Slavkova 2018). Based on extensive field research among Andalusian Gypsies in Spain, Delgado argues that in the process, Roma traditions are given new meanings, solidarity duties are extended to all “brothers in the faith” regardless of kinship and the foundations of a pan-Gypsy Roma community are being formed. This

phenomena is altering the well-known tendency of Roma to construct their social organizational models based primarily on the traditions and rules of the specific Gypsy group (M. C. Delgado 2010:255-259).

The following example shows how solidarity duties are extended beyond the borders of the Roma group and the idea of a pan-Gypsy Roma community is promoted. It also provides an example of how people combined social and religious activities. Finnish Kale evangelists had gathered at the office of NRFF to plan evangelizing activities for the East European Roma in Helsinki. The meeting was held in good spirit. It was initiated with a prayer moment during which Kyösti B stated “*ihmiset hukkuvat kadulla – meidän omiamme*” (“people are perishing on the streets – our own [people]”). In all the prayers and speeches during this meeting it was reflected that Finnish Roma considered the Roma coming from abroad as a part of their own community – they used expressions like “*sama veri*” (same blood) or “*Kaalo on ...*” (Kale (Gypsy) is...), meaning the incoming groups. Ivan often spoke of the “*gypsy heart*”, meaning it to be the common thing among different gypsy groups. However, it was also stressed that when the Bible speaks of “loving one’s fellow man”, that includes all people close to us, regardless of ethnicity. Armas presented the opinion that churches and believers do plenty of things in the name of God and claim that it is God’s will, but whether it is really so is a good question. A discussion on the subject followed. Most of the people agreed with Armas but the general opinion was that it was necessary to proceed with the plan, since it was quite obvious that the newcomer Roma needed to hear about Jesus and get one warm meal a week at least. An underlying assumption was that no one could understand and address a Roma person as well as another Roma. Kyösti B emphasized that we were entering a difficult field “*Me mennään nyt sellaiseen suohon,*” (“We are now going to such a swamp”) that it was necessary for everyone to be conscious of their own calling before God. It was not enough that Roma people who needed to know about Jesus were in Helsinki, it was also necessary to know if it was one’s own God-given task to approach them, and how to do it.

As pointed out by R.B. Roman, for Pentecostal Kale in Finland evangelism is “more than a religious matter: at once a humanitarian engagement that crosses the boundaries of their national belonging and an ethnocentric involvement with Roma communities elsewhere” (R.B. Roman 2017:183). People were concerned about “the newcomer Roma, who need ... one warm meal a week at least” but at the same time pointed out that the spiritual task of “entering a difficult field” to bring the Gospel needs to be “God-given” to a specific person in specific settings.

As I have argued that Pentecostalism is a triggering factor for the interaction of different Roma groups in Finland, it would be a fair question to ask to what precise extent such a triggering factor affects the interaction. My experience is that, while the urge to evangelize all nations but first and foremost those who were felt to be the same people, “*olemme samaa kansaa*”, inspired many Finnish Kale to participate in evangelizing activities towards the newcomers, their relationship was not without its particularities. While several Finnish Kale had opened their homes and families to host and support East European Roma, on many occasions being in close contact with the newcomers brought new challenges. Not all Kale Pentecostals wanted to be associated with East European Roma. Some of them feared contagious diseases, which was justified. It was not unusual that people living on the streets would have parasites like body lice, scabies, etc., but they might sometimes also have serious infectious diseases like tuberculosis. Others would try to avoid socializing with East European Roma for reasons of stigma control. This had been described earlier by R.B. Roman, who had interviewed Finnish Kale activists on their opinions and attitudes concerning the presence of the newcomer East European Roma in Finland. Her study showed that the new migrants were often perceived as a threat by Finnish Roma and Finnish Kale identity was more commonly seen as a differentiating factor rather than one evoking ethnic solidarity (R. Roman 2014:800).



My observation is that the main reasons many Kale feel uneasy with the thought of Foreign Roma settling permanently in Finland are the fear of losing scarce resources, on the one hand, and on the other the fear of reinforcing an existing stigma. As described by Goffman, stigma brings the need for information control, passing and denying connections with similarly stigmatized people (Goffman 1986:121). Concerning the fear of losing resources, Bondarenko describes the attitude of some African Americans towards recent African migrants in USA, who felt that the newcomers were enjoying benefits that had been earned by the suffering of generations of African-Americans (Bondarenko 2015:14). Similarly Solimene addresses the competition for available resources between Bosnian Xoraxané Romá and Romanian Roma in the city of Rome, Italy (Solimene 2011:642-645). Among Finnish Kale were those who simply recognized the needs of the new migrants as so profound that trying to help them would have demanded much more resources than they had available, and would eventually endanger the stability of their own families.

In the following example I will try to illustrate the difference in interaction in the settings of an evangelizing meeting dedicated to East European Roma and when East European Roma unexpectedly visited a Pentecostal gathering organized by Kale. One of the churches in the metropolitan area had organized a Kale Pentecostal gathering. Our family's old Kale friend Pekka (pseudonym) sent me an invitation. He usually asks me to bring friends with me as well. Four of the Bulgarian Roma and I decided to attend. After the sermon, Pekka came to greet me and the people with me. He was interested to know where they had come from. I asked Pekka whether he felt that the guests were the same people as he, since they were Roma. Pekka replied that he identified himself more as a Christian and the people in the congregation were his sisters and brothers, regardless of their ethnicity. I recalled that we had actually discussed this subject years earlier, long before I became a researcher. Pekka, however, asked whether our guests would be willing to be blessed. Emilia (Bulgarian Roma) replied that she would like the

brothers to bless their baby, since it often had problems with ear infection. Pekka asked Tenho to pray. Tenho was also an old friend, who used to visit our home prayer group every now and again before he got married. Tenho was known as a “*Jumalan hullu*” “God’s fool”, a person who was very enthusiastic about spiritual life and a warm and friendly person. Tenho came to pray, and he prayed passionately for Emilia, her daughter, and the baby. He said that he had recently been in Romania and also briefly visited the Bulgarian side of the border. He felt that Romanian and Bulgarian Roma constituted the same nation as Finnish Roma, and of course he was willing to pray for his own people. When Radostin and Milena saw this prayer, Milena came and asked Pekka and Tenho to pray for them as well. We did so; during both prayers I translated Tenho’s words into Bulgarian.

*One thing which caught my attention this afternoon was that at the meeting there were Kale who knew Radostin and Milena fairly well from the evangelizing meetings at Green Oasis and several other places. These people greeted Radostin but from a distance. None of them came to talk with him. I was sorry for Radostin and somewhat ashamed for these men who called themselves followers of Christ. On the way to the meeting, Milena asked me when they could see our son. I replied that I’d try to arrange it soon and decided to invite them for an ice-cream at our balcony after the meeting. My Bulgarian Roma friends gladly accepted and we had a nice half-hour together. I was thinking for myself that “here I am studying the relationship between East European Roma and Finnish Roma and it turns out that it is only me, ‘the Bulgarian gadzi’, who wants to invite the newborn believers home even for a short visit” ... Not that that it makes me better believer but I wonder Why? (Diary 9.5.2015)*

Dwelling on this occasion, which at the time seemed a challenge to the veracity of my study, I realized that what I had envisioned as “contradictory, improper Christian behaviour” had to do with the fact that

the Kale informants were living in two parallel social realities which had crossed at that time and place. On one hand they were part of the Finnish Kale community, with its traditional norms and strict purity rules. The meeting was attended by a multitude of Kale, some of whom were not converts. Not all Kale would have approved of socializing with the East European Roma, not even all of the Kale Pentecostals. In such settings close contact with East European Roma would have involved a social cost, a danger of breaking traditional rules and complicating one's relationship with one's peers. This could be seen as an instance of Pentecostalism being a "part-culture", as described by Coleman (2006), and a form of universalism meeting particularity, as conceptualized by Robbins (2010). According to Coleman, Pentecostalism can be characterized as a "part-culture" – a way of conceptualizing human experience that by default anticipates encountering other ways of conceptualizing, which it would not accept (Coleman 2006:3). Robbins brings this idea a step further, suggesting that Pentecostalism, like many other forms of Christianity as well as many other religions, is a form of universalism. All universalisms can be seen as "part-cultures" since they are in turn dependent on particularism, meaning that social lives take place always in local particular terms and their "cultural orderings". For this reason, people involved with the process of change induced by conversion to Pentecostalism inescapably face situations in which they need to negotiate between the universal and the particular, the new and old ways of life (Robbins 2010:648). In this specific situation the Pentecostal Kale who were involved in evangelizing East European Roma created an uneasy balance in their behavior between the demands of the unconditional Christian love professed by the Pentecostal doctrine and the rules of the Finnish Kale community. Similarly, for the Gitanos studied by Gay y Blasco, Evangelism meant the coexistence of the notion of transformation with the notion of continuity. Converts were supposed to change but at the same time to preserve the "Gitano way of being" (Gay y Blasco 1999:163).

Borrowing the terminology used by Strathern (2011) and Green (2017), it is possible to look at individuals and their relationship both from perspectivalist and perspectivist standpoints. (Strathern 2011, 90-94; Green 2017:202-203). Perspectivalism reflects, or perhaps partly generates, an Euro-American kind of person, in which a predefined individual chooses between possible relationships and standpoints. Whereas perspectivism reflects a (Malenesian/Amerindian) type of person who is defined by his/her relationships. In my experience, this difference in approach to social life constitutes a challenge for Finnish Roma and many other Roma groups (for example Bulgarian Kardarashi) with a pronounced collective way of life. The main population assumes an Euro-American type of individual, who can choose a relation or a point of view, whereas for the Finnish Kale population, in many cases the relationships are decisive.

For example, when a Finnish Kale meets unfamiliar Finnish Kale, the first question is “*Who are you?*” “*Keitä sinä olet?*” in plural, which essentially means, “From which family/kin group are you?” In other words, plurality is implied. The expected answer is “*I am the son/daughter of ...*” and the answer exerts a significant influence on how the new relationship develops. A Finnish Kale traditional way of life, social relationships and viewpoints are to a large extent defined by the person’s position within his/her kin group, as well as how this kin group is positioned within the majority population and in relationship with other Roma kin groups. A clear example would be the principle of avoidance. If a Kale causes significant (usually permanent) harm to another Kale, the whole kin group of the offender is supposed to avoid the whole kin group of the offended out of respect for their sorrow. In the worst cases such avoidance may be prolonged over several generations. Even members of the offender’s kin group who were not born when the wrongdoing occurred are supposed to avoid all the members of the offended kin group, some of whom were also not born at the time of the incident. This way of organizing social relations is often incomprehensible to the majority population. Some younger Kale also prefer the

perspectivalistic standpoint, but within the scope of family or group they comply with the tradition. For example, a young member of the offended family may accept the presence and even a relationship with members of the offender's kin group but they would rarely reveal it to their relatives. Collective opinions and standpoints are also common. It is usual for a certain family to like or dislike some person or have a common opinion on some issue, although younger people may take a different stance. That is why, when being introduced to new people, it is absolutely essential to get to know to which kin group they belong. The answer to the question "*Keitä sinä olet?*" ("Who are you?") determines whether it is appropriate to get acquainted and reveals the reputation of the kin group and the individual in question as well.

When a Roma person embraces Christian values in the form of conversion to Pentecostalism, this complicates the picture further. According to Mauss, the Western notion of the human person is derived from Christianity. The concept of a "moral person" responsible for one's choices and actions was first defined in Christian teaching (Mauss 1985 [1938]:19). The importance of personal moral choice in each situation is also emphasized in Pentecostalism. A casual Pentecostal saying goes, "*God has only children, no grandchildren, nephews, nieces, etc.*" This means that the relationship of a human with God is always personal and cannot be mediated through other people. Mauss argues that this kind of understanding, according to which the "person" equals the "self" and "self" equals consciousness, was developed by the sectarian movements of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as the Moravian Brothers, the Puritans and the Pietists (Mauss 1985 [1938]:21). For the Kale participants of my research, it means that, in line with Pentecostal teaching, they feel personally and directly responsible to God for their deeds. That is to say, they cannot justify their decisions and opinions based on the practices and decisions of the kin group. In some instances, the moral demands placed by these two authorities – one derived from Christian Pentecostal teaching and one from traditional social organization – come into conflict, for example in the case when Bulgarian Roma unexpectedly visited the Pentecostal gathering of Finnish Kale. Those of

the Kale who had participated in the evangelizing events and knew some of the Bulgarian Roma from before felt conflicting expectations. They needed to decide whether to abide by the principles of Christian love and accept the newcomers gladly or to show respect for Kale traditions and keep a distance.

Living according to Pentecostal values and collective Roma cultural values simultaneously can be challenging. LeVine (1990:468-469) states that Western psychoanalytic theory regards autonomy and individualization as obligatory goals for healthy psychological development. Dependence and symbiotic relationships are seen as necessary only in early childhood. Deviation from such development is seen as pathological. At the same time, there are several examples of non-Western cultural traditions in which adult relationships, for example on the level of kin or community, may be seen as experienced as symbiotic without any indication of pathology. An example of this would be the Japanese collective cultural tradition, in which dependence and interpersonal control are expected.

The challenges posed by combining Western and Pentecostal values stressing individual responsibility and Roma collective cultural values are often addressed in Roma Pentecostal sermons. What does it mean in practice that a “*New born Roma is a better Roma*”? How should one live together with fellow Roma who are not “*New Born*”? How should one deal with, for example, ritual purity norms?

An elderly Finnish Kale couple shared the story of their conversion in their youth. As new converts, they were advised by the congregation that ritual purity rules were not valid for “*born again children of God*” and the couple rejected the rules in their home. As a consequence, none of their non-convert Kale relatives and friends would visit them. The family ended up having to change their flat and replace all their kitchenware before the ritual purity of their home and relations with non-convert fellows could be restored. Nowadays, newly converted Kale Pentecostals are commonly advised by older Kale in the church and such dramatic incidents rarely occur. Nevertheless, life keeps throwing up situations in which the demands of tradition and new customs collide. To balance the picture, it is important to point out that,

living with Pentecostal Kale, one does not get the feeling that their life is constant “tightrope walking”. After all, they have hundreds of years of experience in living with two significantly different cultural traditions simultaneously. Citing Viljanen (Viljanen, Hagert, and Blomerus 2007:464), they know how to put “*häpeat häkkiin*” (“the shames in a cage”) (in this case “shames” can be probably best understood as traditions connected to respect for elders) meaning to get along with different cultural norms.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

My argument is that the role of Pentecostalism as a catalyst for the interaction between the Roma Groups in the current study, who would otherwise likely abide by the principle of non-interference in each other’s affairs, has both social and spiritual dimensions. While Pentecostal conversion plays a role in fulfilling personal and group needs, such as combating deprivation and displacement, societal shift towards democratization, experimenting with new social practices, empowerment of women, etc. the influence of its spiritual dimension should not be underestimated.

Many of the encounters and interaction between Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Pentecostal settings could be seen as social phenomena. East European Roma begging on the streets of Helsinki were often driven by poverty and precariousness to reach out for any kind of help offered. The East European Roma who had recently settled in Finland were interested in the possibility of upward social mobility they perceived in forming contacts with established Finnish Pentecostal Roma Activists and the organizations they represented. However, the informants’ experience was that the perceived influence of a divine agent, “*The Holy Spirit*”, in a person’s life produced a new inner moral code, “*the new heart*”. This “*new heart*” was willing to accept the “social cost”, as described by (Gross 2012:365), of crossing borders in order to reach fellow people they would otherwise have more or less politely avoided. Crossing borders, however, also has its limitations. Pentecostalism is conceptualized by Coleman as part-culture and by Robins as universalism encountering particularity. As such it inevitably faces more or less

peaceful negotiations with the local cosmologies and cultural practices (Coleman 2006:3; Robbins 2010:648). Encouraged by their Pentecostal worldview and new inner moral code acquired on conversion, several Pentecostal Kale reached out with humanitarian help and evangelizing activities to the new East European Roma migrants, but at the same time they had to take into account the demands of their local social settings and the “*Kaale kultuuri*” (“Kale culture”) as described by R.B. Roman (R. B. Roman 2017:6). At that point, the attributes of perspectivistic and perspectivalistic way of creating relations, as described by Strathern (2011) and Green (2017), had to be combined. My research material suggests that Kale create relations in both ways. While this is not in line with how this social phenomenon is conceptualized by Strathern, it appears to me to be an ethnographic reality for the Roma in Helsinki whom I studied.

As a form of universalism, Pentecostalism does meet the particularity of local cultural traditions and this encounter, according to Robbins, is necessary for “animating its transformative force”. According to Robbins, citing Coleman (2006), developing his argument further and in my view altering it a bit, as a “part-culture” Pentecostalism comes into “edgy contact” with other worldviews, acknowledging their existence but rejecting their values. (Coleman 2006:3; Robbins 2010:648) My interpretation is that Pentecostalism does reject local cosmologies but does not reject all local values. As a consequence of rejecting the local cosmologies and some of their values, converts find themselves in a situation where they need to deal with values of the past that they claim they have left behind. That was the case of the Urapmins described by Robbins as “troubled” because they were caught between two value systems (Robbins 2004a:313-314). Such was also the case of the Evangelical Gitanos studied by Gay y Blasco, who struggled to live up to the expectations of Pentecostal preaching for rejecting feuding. Her study describes a case in which enemies forgave each other dramatically at a public meeting but suspicions concerning the sincerity of both parties flared up immediately among their respective patrigrups the



following day (Gay y Blasco 1999:167-168). Similar difficulties are experienced by the community studied in the current research, striving to resolve the issue of organizing Pentecostal meetings that members of feuding kin groups could attend together.

As Pentecostalism does not reject all values of the “particularities” it encounters, some local values are approved and retained. Such was the case with the Gitano converts, who were expected to transform but still keep the core code of the “Gitano way of being” (Gay y Blasco 1999:163). Kopsa-Schön writes about how Kale traditions of respect for elders and purity rules fit religious ideology and are envisioned as being of Biblical origin (Kopsa-Schön 1996:260). I also frequently met such ideas in the field. Throughout fieldwork, one of the main messages of sermons preached by Kale to East European Roma and vice versa at Pentecostal gatherings was that Roma do not stop being Roma when they are “*born again*”, but become better Roma. However, that is also the point where preserving specific local cultural values goes hand in hand with “cultural reinvention” as described by Delgado (M. C. Delgado 2010:255). In cultural reinvention, traditional practices are given new meaning. Gay y Blasco gives an example of how the notion of respect that is central to the “Gitano way of being” is appropriated, picturing a new standpoint towards the non-Roma world and giving young Roma male converts the opportunity to also be viewed as “men of respect”, contrary to traditional practice (Gay y Blasco 1999:170). One example for Kale, could be interpreting the “period of ritual impurity” of young mothers described by Viljanen as a “period dedicated to rest”, when fellow Kale women take care of the kitchen work as commonly presented by Roma Pentecostal activists (Viljanen 2012:413). During fieldwork, I attended a lesson in Roma culture together with Angelica, since I was appointed as one of her examiners for the vocational education she was participating in. The teacher of the course, a prominent Pentecostal Finnish Roma Activist, described the period of “ritual impurity” of new mothers, during which they are not supposed to enter the kitchen, as a period when they are granted rest and liberated from kitchen work.

According to Coleman, the Charismatic Christianity convert is inevitably engaged simultaneously in two cultures: the culture of the congregation and that of the surrounding population. This brings with it the need to use different language – the one of the civil society and the one spoken in the church. A convert may also engage in “double talk”, meaning that his/her statements may intentionally contain double meanings – one directed to the civil public and one to converts. Coleman gives an example of the famous Swedish singer Carola, known as a professing Charismatic Christian, singing a song at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1991, which she eventually won. The lyrics of the song had an intentional “double meaning”. Coleman argues that, along with employing language carrying different significations and functions, converts engage with two levels of reality simultaneously, like the Roma who live amongst the majority population and participate simultaneously in two different cultural traditions. Coleman develops his argument further to make a comparison with anthropologists during fieldwork, living as “Homo Duplex” in order to be able to function in both of his/her environments, the academia and the studied community (Coleman 2006:8-10). The term Homo Duplex was initially introduced by Emile Durkheim to designate the dual nature of man incorporating on one hand individuality and on the other hand everything within a human presenting something other than himself, i.e. instinct and morality (Durkheim 2005:37). Finnish Pentecostals commonly refer to the language used in Charismatic congregations as “*Kanaan kieli*”, the “*language of Canaan*”, where Canaan is the Promised Land for Israelites. Such language is used to describe spiritual reality and contains idioms referring to incidents from the Bible, often from the Old Testament. This study provides several examples for life at different levels of reality. One of them was the situation when the NRFF organized evangelizing meetings for East European Roma but classified them in their annual report as recreational activities. A casual example for Kale would be discussing the importance of hygiene in a specific situation (for example, proper use of

kitchenware), with a representative of the majority population when other Kale would know the issue is ritual purity.

For Pentecostal Kale and Pentecostal East European Roma in Finland it appears to be that their “local Pentecostal cultural traditions and values” fit together more readily than their local Roma traditions. When Pentecostal Roma from these two different groups meet, they share testimonies, concerns about the salvation of fellow people, struggles with combating sin in local communities, plans and hopes for the future of their children in spiritual and worldly aspect. These are issues common to Pentecostals generally. Whenever they engage in Pentecostal gatherings together, they follow a roughly similar “ritual grammar” as described by Coleman and Hackett (Coleman and Hackett 2015:15). Simultaneously they discuss commonalities and differences of local Roma customs and occasionally engage in “cultural reinvention”. Especially in the cases when one group is evangelizing the other, a process of “ethnogenesis” takes places, as this term is defined by Delago (2010:255-259), meaning that solidarity duties are extended to all “*brothers in the faith*”, regardless of kinship and promoting the idea of universal “pan-Gypsy” Roma community,. Thus Pentecostalism provides common ground for experiencing and elaborating on commonality in Roma identity issues as well.

In this chapter I have discussed the role that Pentecostal or Charismatic religious affiliation plays in shaping the relationship between Finnish and East European Roma. Fieldwork indicated that another important factor was nationality. Some of the Finnish Kale I interacted with saw national belonging as a delimiter separating them from East European Roma. All of the Finnish Kale I met expressed that they are specifically Finnish Roma and not any other type of Roma. The following chapter will be dedicated to the impact of nationality on the interaction of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Helsinki.

## 4. May the Finnish Roma Understand, that I Still Love My Land - Bulgaria

### 4.1 Nationality and Citizenship

*"For 13 years I prayed before God to lead me away from this misery so that I could come here (to Finland) and live as a white person, a normal life. But I want to say to everybody, I am not at all indifferent to Bulgaria. I love Bulgaria, I love my country...." (Ivan, 17.9.2015, Bulgarian Roma residing in Finland for 7 years)*

Throughout my fieldwork, the influence of nationality on the life of the Roma groups with whom I spent my time was apparent. Along with ethnicity and religious affiliation, these people also identify themselves strongly on the basis of nationality. It is not the same to be Bulgarian Roma and Romanian Roma, even if all of the people involved belong to the transnational *Kardarashi* community, sharing a similar variant of the Romani language and, to a great extent, similar cultural attitudes. The difference between Finnish and East European Roma is even greater. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and attempt to analyze how the national identities of these groups affects their interaction. Based on the time I spent with Roma in Helsinki, and contrary to common assumptions about the Roma more generally, it seems clear that nationality is as important as other forms of identification for the people I studied. In addition, the sense of belonging to a specific nation appears not to be static and predefined, but rather flexible and mutable over the lifespan of an individual.

The notions of nation and national identity have been defined in several ways in anthropology. Here I will mention two commonly used definitions. According to Ernest Gellner's now classic definition (1983:7), "two men are of the same nation if and only if they 1) share the same culture ...and 2) recognize each other as belonging to the same nation". The membership of a nation involves acknowledging certain mutual rights and obligations to each other: at the core of the notion is "recognition of each other as

fellows”, rather than the presence of other attributes like a common land and culture. Different groups may define nationality in different terms, but in all cases the notion of nation is essentially exclusive: some people belong to it and others do not. Another classic definition is that of Benedict Anderson (1991), who suggests that a nation is “an *imagined*, inherently *limited*, and *sovereign* political *community*”. It is *imagined* because it is constituted of members, most of whom do not and will never know each other personally. It is *limited*, because all nations have boundaries, beyond which other nations are positioned. Nations are imagined as *sovereign* within the sovereign state, since, according to Anderson, the concept was coined during the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, marked by the abolition of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic domain. *Community* refers to the perception of membership of a nation of brotherhood, regardless of the fact that inequality and exploitation are a part of life for many nations (B. Anderson 1991:6-7). There are, however, several examples of nations that do not dwell within a sovereign state. As the idea of a nation appears to exist in the eye of the beholder, rather than relying entirely on generalized definitions, I will focus on outlining how the people I studied thought and acted upon the notion of nation.

From the definitions above, the most applicable to the understanding of the participants of this research seems to be the idea that membership of a nation involves mutual rights and obligations and a sense of a fellowship or brotherhood. As members of the Bulgarian nation, for example, Bulgarian Roma expected the state of Bulgaria (formed by the Bulgarian nation) to fulfil its obligations towards them in terms of, for example, social security, health care and basic education. Finnish Kale in turn felt that their ancestors had fulfilled their obligation towards the Finnish nation by participating in the wars to preserve the independence of Finland (1939-1944). At the same time, informants did not see similarity of culture as a prerequisite for membership in a nation. Rather they saw themselves as a minority within a nation, which had the right to preserve and maintain their own specific cultural traditions.

## **4.2 Bulgarian, Romanian and Finnish Roma**

As noted by Tervonen and Enache (2017), many of the East European Roma visible in the streets of Helsinki they interviewed identified themselves as Roma, but rejected the idea of placing Romanian and Bulgarians in the same group, highlighting the differences between groups and nationalities (Tervonen and Enache 2017:1116). Discussing Bulgarian Kardarashi markers of identification, Erolova (2003) asserts that juxtaposing themselves against and repudiating other Roma groups plays a central role in framing their ethnic identification (Еролова 2003, 285-286). My observation is that, in the settings of a Day Centre visited by most of the migrant Roma dwelling on the streets of Helsinki, this is also commonly the case when Roma groups of different nationalities attempt to differentiate themselves from each other. In discussion with Bulgarian Roma as well as with social workers working closely with Romanian Roma, it became apparent that both groups shared a strong concern that it “the other group” was endangering the reputation of all East European Roma through improper behaviour in public. The Day Centre I did a large part of my fieldwork at was divided in territory by the Romanian and Bulgarian Roma. The available computers were allocated (by the customers) for Bulgarian or Romanian use, even the microwave ovens used for warming and cooking the meals of the visitors were clearly labelled by the staff. At all celebrations there was different food prepared by and for Romanian and Bulgarian Roma respectively. The two groups could taste each other’s dishes but generally refrained from doing so, and consumed their own food. Moreover, the city centre of Helsinki was divided by the two groups as well. Each group had their assigned area for practising economic activities such as selling magazines or begging.



**Figure 20 “Nationally” labelled microwave ovens at a Day Centre, 24.6.2015**

**(Photograph Lidia Gripenberg)**

Sometimes the process of differentiation would acquire even comic connotations. On one occasion, two of my Bulgarian Roma informants were sitting in the parlour of the Day Centre. One of them was holding a cute baby girl in his lap and singing Bulgarian lullabies to her. It was apparent that the child had awoken warm feelings in the midst of the hard days of the young homeless man. I had first met Hristo (pseudonym) a few weeks earlier in a hospital, where he had been visiting one of his best friends. Hristo’s friend had been attacked by burglars during the night in his tent, who stole all the money he had collected by gathering cans for the whole summer (about 1000 euro) and in addition broke his jaw with a metal rod. I also knew that Hristo had left his only son back in Bulgaria in order to “put bread on the table” for the family by gathering cans in Finland. Afterwards an older Bulgarian Roma man joined Hristo and, looking at the baby, exclaimed: “It’s Romanian.” The phrase sounded like an emergency warning, as if Hristo were holding burning coals in his lap. Hristo calmly replied, “It doesn’t matter that she is Romanian, it’s just a baby.” Even though the exclamation of the older man was probably meant as a joke, it was a joke with a message. Romanian Roma were perceived as essentially different, even as infants.

Nationality is a very strong identifier for Finnish Roma as well (Friman-Korpela 2014:59; R. Roman 2014:799). Most Finnish Roma have a powerful sense of being Finnish and many of them are aware and proud of the fact that Finnish Kale participated in the wars to preserve the independence of Finland, known as the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944). Most of the Finnish Kale who do not want to be associated with the recently migrated East European Roma claim membership of the Finnish nation, particularly to a traditional Kale minority of Finland, and deny or disregard ethnic membership of a transnational Roma community based on ethnic identity (R. Roman 2014:805–806).

*“That is really the big question: that the main population in Finland then equates us with them (East European Roma), that we are the same Roma, when we are Finnish Roma. We are like Finns. That equating is the worst. And when they do something bad, people think they are the same as us. And I don’t even understand them, because we cannot speak with them. It is just like taking a Chinese and Finn among them. They are completely different; it is the same thing. Yes, we help them if they have difficulties, but we also help Finns if they are, for example, drunks.” (Finnish Kale woman 2015)*

### **4.3 National Identity and Territory**

In her study on the territorialization of national identity Malkki (1992) suggests that identity is always a “creolized aggregate composed through bricolage”. National identity is seen as a dynamic construct, partly created by the individual or the group itself, partly given by others through categorization, carrying different implications and fulfilling different functions. Among others, at times it may serve as a source of memories, a status symbol and a shield or even a weapon but it may also imply a specific label. The following section is an attempt to illuminate the notions on which the national identity of my closest informants appeared to rest.



*“I love Bulgaria, I love my country, but the government does not take care of me. The system itself kills us there, which is why I am here, underline that. If you hear people saying, “Gypsies should be made into soap (referring to holocaust), death for the Gypsies” But ... I still love my land. One day I will return there. Only God knows when that will be. Because my old parents are there, I don’t know if I will see them next year. I am not indifferent to by homeland, that’s where I was born.” (Ivan, Bulgarian Roma)*

The rhetoric of Bulgarian national belonging commonly employs the metaphor of the land and the soil, described specifically as fertile black soil, “чернозем”. As characterized by Malkki (1992), people see themselves as rooted in that place and deriving their strength and identity in an arborescent manner, that is, in the way a tree acquires its vital power from the earth (Malkki 1992:27). In the discussions I have had with my Bulgarian Roma informants, the land of birth, the motherland, has been described as a source of identity and strength. Many of my informants also own land and houses in their country of origin. Some have no specific plans for the future but some are deliberately building and improving their houses “back home”, the latter with the explicit intention to return at least for retirement if not earlier. While Roma have often been categorized in research literature as a peripatetic people exploiting a specific ecological niche (Salo 1987; G. Gmelch and Gmelch 1987; Kaminski 1987; Piasere 1987; Liegeois 1987; Berland and Rao 2004; Okely 1983), in practice, it is possible to encounter quite contradictory cases. For example, for Finnish Kale, the places where their relatives are buried of very high value and emotional attachment. Whenever possible, a deceased Finnish Kale would be buried in the same graveyard as his/her ancestors, even if he/she has spent most of their life in a different place or in another country. This attachment to place is visible also in the Finnish Kale custom of moving permission, which Berlin (2015, 151) has written about. According to the Kale custom, practically every area in Finland is “looked after” by a specific Roma family, who have the right to decide whether

newcomer Kale are welcome to the area. The underlying ideology in the past, when most Kale made their living as traveling merchants, was to preserve the market space of the area for the local family's income generation. Nowadays the custom is mostly a tool for image management. The local Kale, who have established connections to the local *gadje* (main population) over the years, are guarding their reputation from being spoiled by the potential misbehaviour of Kale newcomers.

This, however, is not to say that Finnish Kale refrain from travelling. On the contrary, they may describe themselves as semi-sedentary (Vuolasranta 2015) and it is known that they may frequently change residence for family or economic reasons. Similarly, while for Bulgarian Roma the place of origin is of high significance, many of them do not hesitate to migrate for economic reasons, which very often is a strategy of survival. The term "semi-sedentary" could well describe the way of life of several East European Roma families I met during fieldwork. Those people were settled in their home countries, possessed land and houses, sometimes even better and more expensive ones than those owned by the majority population. During the summer season they visited Finland to generate income. Several of those families had been visiting Finland for many (7-8) years in a row. They usually begged, collected cans and sold magazines. Understandably, they needed to perform an identity of poor, needy people while begging, which did not correlate to the economic status they had back home. While some of the people begging on the streets of Helsinki enjoy economic wellbeing in their home countries, many, probably most, of them are trapped in poverty and begging is for them a means of survival.

Reading research literature on Roma as well as observing representatives of different Roma groups during fieldwork, I acquired a specific point of view on the issue of nomadism / sedentary way of life. At present it seems that many Roma groups have been sedentary for more than a century. They have no memory of a peripatetic way of life in the history of their ancestors and for them a mobile way of life is a foreign idea. There are also groups who are at present sedentary but have a clear memory of the

travelling and forced or voluntary sedentarization of their ancestors. Finnish Kale, for example, started to settle only in the 1970s, when the state provided inexpensive housing for them. Before that, most of them travelled all around the year, while some found shelter in farmhouses for the winter season. Those people enjoy a sedentary way of life but it seems that for them the threshold of changing location is fairly low. There are also the semi-sedentary people, who are peripatetic in specific territories during the warm season and sedentary during winter. This kind of variation among Bulgarian Roma groups has been outlined and explained by Marushiakova and Popov (1997:71-76). In the light of my experiences with Roma groups in Helsinki, I suggest that 'nomadism,' at least for these groups, is a relative concept, and one that has a specific scale. It could be that people wander in and out of Bulgaria, but still have a particular home there. Then they are still Bulgarian, even if they move habitually. This habit of moving may make others, who do not move, not very trusting of mobile people; but it does not necessarily make them any less Bulgarian (or other nationality). For the purposes of the current research it is important to underline that all of the informants, regardless of their level of mobility, displayed a clear sense of belonging to a specific nation, meant in both metaphorical and literal, spatial, terms.

#### **4.4 Between National and Transnational Roma Identity**

While most of my work describes the shared Roma Identity of Finnish Kale and East European Roma, and how it is lived and constructed on a day to day basis, it must be duly recognized that the subject of the study has limited the selection of informants to a certain extent. By this I mean that, as I was studying the interaction of different Roma groups in Helsinki, I spent most of my time with people who did participate in this kind of interaction. It is natural that the Roma who willingly interact with each other across group and national borders are mostly those who support the idea of a transnational Roma identity and Roma nation. However, that does not mean everyone is in favour of that idea. Several people I met, East European and Finnish Roma alike, would question the notion of Roma international solidarity. This

was especially the case among the older generation of Finnish Kale, many of whom resisted the concept of a Roma 'nation' and, in particular, the Roma flag as a symbol of it. Those people would elaborate on the fact that Finnish Kale are a part – a minority – of the Finnish nation. They would stress the participation of Kale in the wars to preserve the independence of Finland and the position of the Kale as an active and recognized social group that is part of the wider Finnish population. The sometimes voiced and sometimes implied fear was that constituting Roma as a nation without a state could lead to the decay of the Kale position as a part of the Finnish nation. As a result, as mentioned earlier, some Finnish Kale refrain from being associated in any way with the newcomer East European Roma (R. Roman 2014).

Yet the fact that Roma are not the 'same' kinds of nationals as the others in whose name the nation was established does not prevent either the Roma themselves or other nationals from recognizing their right to belong to that place. There could be semantic questions raised about whether this is nationality, as opposed to citizenship: a cultural reference or a status provided by the laws of the Finnish state. Yet, whichever it is, for the Roma it confers a sense of belonging to the specific national territory into which they were born, a belonging that is recognized by both Roma and non-Roma residents of the same territory. Similar ideas have been presented in the research literature dealing with the political implications of international Roma solidarity. The onset of Roma nationalism in the 1970s and 1980s was marked by the establishment of the International Roma Union and the Roma National Congress. The main aim of these organizations has been to define and promote the concept of Roma as a nation without a territory (Acton and Klímová 2001:216). While Roma activists have not stressed territorial demands, the lack of a legitimate Roma state has been recognized as a drawback. In many countries the Roma lack the political leverage to defend their interests on a national level, whereas on an international level they are represented by an elite of Roma activists, whose legitimate representation is made questionable by the lack of any democratic mandate (McGarry 2011:284). According to McGarry (2009), constituting

Roma identity in transnational political contexts involves a danger that this identity would be void of meaning when applied on a national level. In addition, Mirga and George (1997) warn of the potential threat that defining Roma as a nation across national borders may fuel a perception of Roma as not being full citizens of their states of residence. Vermeersch (2006:181-182) in turn characterizes the efforts of Roma activist in Hungary, The Czech Republic and Slovakia to construct a common Roma identity as “double jeopardy”. In order to promote the idea of Roma nation and transboundary Roma solidarity, the activist would need to highlight their ethnic identity. That involves a risk of being even more strongly discredited by the surrounding society, as locally, Roma identity is strongly stigmatized. Seen as too different from the dominant ethnic group of the nation state, they may become effectively excluded.

My ethnographic experience with Roma in Helsinki suggests that the relationship Roma have with territory is not the same as the concept of ‘nation’ would imply. ‘Nation’, as part of the definition of the word, implies an association with a particular territory. The Roma who participated in my research have special associations with particular places – Bulgaria, Romania, Finland – but while this association appears to be national for Roma, it is not national in the same way as nationality is experienced by other people, because of this somewhat different association with the territory of the nation. For Roma in Helsinki, it appears to be national in terms of being a person who was born and grew up in that place, and has social and material ties to that place, and who shares certain values, language and attitudes with others in that place, but does not quite belong to the place in exactly the same way as others. In effect they see themselves as a minority within the “nation inhabiting that specific territory”.

In sum, my ethnographic research suggests that, in Helsinki, Roma have two kinds of belonging to the place: as Roma, which is a cross-border identification; and as nationals, which is territory-specific. Often these two kinds of belonging are combined, as in the case of Finnish Kale. To my understanding Finnish Kale see themselves as a specific group following specific cultural traditions and norms. For example,

even when they have lived for decades and across generations in Sweden they continue to use the self-appellation “*Suomen Kaaleita*” “Finnish Kale”. Similarly, I met *Kardarashi*, who were born and grew up in Bulgaria and, when abroad, refer to themselves as Bulgarian Roma. Nevertheless, among Bulgarian Roma they refer to themselves as Serbian *Kardarashi*, because their ancestors came from Serbia and some of them still speak Serbian. They were forcefully settled in Bulgaria during the 1950s. Most of the Roma I met valued their “ancestors and their roots” highly. Although many of them were prepared to move and migrate as a means for economic survival or dealing with stigmatization and marginalization, they were emotionally attached to the “land of their origin”. In my view, for many of those people, being nationals of the country they were born and raised in is as essential as being Roma.

#### **4.5 Nation and Territorial Boundaries**

Many of my informants saw themselves as members of a particular national community, placed in a specific territory. That specific country has provided the conditions for their upbringing as social beings, for good and for ill. Many Roma expressed a certain loyalty towards their national community of origin. In particular, most of the Finnish Kale, would emphasize that Finland is a good country where, regardless of the existing marginalization of the Kale minority, a Roma is granted respect as a human being. Further, Finnish Kale who had embraced the idea of Roma as a transboundary ethnic community were willing to welcome East European Roma to Finland. They wanted to share the goods offered to them in Finland in terms of housing, social security, possibilities for education and employment with their brethren suffering from extreme poverty and marginalization in their countries of origin. The cultural diversity of the new migrant Roma groups was seen as a way to enrich local Roma tradition and a chance to learn from each other and support each other.

On the contrary, the East European Roma, while feeling nostalgia towards their birthplaces, kin and the friends they left behind, would express bitterness towards the country where they were treated with

indifference or even cruelty. For that reason, the younger generation of immigrant East European Roma, who felt that they have more years of life in front of them than left behind, often felt that they would prefer to join the new country they had entered and distance themselves from the original one. Similarly to the informants of Speizer (2016:186) writing about Roma in Slovenia, they would describe home as a place where they feel safe and where life is peaceful and orderly. Along that line of thought, they described Finland, their new country, as their home. A woman in her mid-twenties told me that for her Finland feels home, because here she could freely visit a coffee shop. In the local shopping centre, wearing just casual clothes, she could enjoy her coffee moments with her family and be at rest. In contrast back in her hometown in Bulgaria, even wearing her best, most fashionable clothes, she was denied entrance to a coffee shop. The pretext was that she did not possess a club card for entrance, since her physiognomy made her recognizable as Roma. Joining the new country and bitterness towards the country of birth however does not necessarily result into complete abandonment of the country of birth. As conceptualized by Glick Schiller (2017:17), people are able and at times willing to participate in the social and political life of two countries simultaneously. It remains to be seen whether this will be the case for the East European Roma who have recently migrated to Finland, or at least for their younger generation. These fieldwork observations, however, point towards multiple, rather than singular understandings of the concept of nation as well as towards a multiplicity of the sense of belonging.

#### **4.6 Political Focus and Centre of Identity**

Although the participants of my research did not participate in any specific political projects concerning their country of origin, for many of them it could be said that, as indicated by Glick Schiller (2005:571) and Anderson (1998), their “political focus and centre of identity continued to be the territory of the homeland”. Most of them have resided for several years outside the borders of Bulgaria, in Finland or in other European countries before entering Finland. Nevertheless they followed the politics and daily

life events in Bulgaria closely through the means of media and social media and personal contacts. They also discussed these political events among themselves and with friends and relatives in Bulgaria and elsewhere abroad on a more or less daily basis. Most of the people I interacted with kept sending money to sustain relatives, friends and churches in Bulgaria and Romania even after years of permanent residence abroad.

Glick Schiller (2005:578) argues that some migrants are driven to stronger identification with their country of origin due to racism and experiences of marginalization in the country of immigration. Such has been the case for many Latin America, Caribbean and Asian migrants in the United States. In the following excerpt, a Bulgarian Roma informant describes his experiences of negative stereotyping and affirming belonging to his land of birth:

*“As a whole, they (Finnish Roma) despise us. As I said in the beginning, they take us as second class people. We are poor, it is true, one can see here on every corner there are Romanian Roma who beg. They beg, because in Romania and in Bulgaria they don’t have anything to eat, in Romania and Bulgaria the life is the same.... But I want to say to everybody, I love Bulgaria... may the Finnish Roma understand, that I still love my land.”*  
*(Ivan, 17.9.2015, Bulgarian Roma)*

Often the discussions at the coffee table of the Day Centre, which I visited several times a week during fieldwork, revolved around the issue of Bulgarian Roma being mistaken for Romanian people and treated with disrespect while begging, selling magazines and collecting cans in the streets of Helsinki and in shopping centres. Many of the participants of the research experienced this as offensive and emphasized that they were Bulgarian and not Romanian. Some of the people who had arrived from other European cities explained that in their view the reputation of Bulgarians there is much better than that of Romanians and wanted to underline their Bulgarian origin.



My point here is that despite the fact that the Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki I worked with had left their land of birth because of what they saw as insurmountable difficulties there, many of them continued to identify strongly with their country of birth. Similar observations were made about Romanian Roma by Tervonen and Enache (2017:1116) in their research on bordering actions taken towards East European Roma in Helsinki. The older generation of Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki, especially, continued to actively follow the political life of Bulgaria through the daily news offered by Bulgarian TV channels broadcast via satellites and on the internet and underlined that they were Bulgarian. In addition to the strong bond they experienced with their land of birth, their daily life was influenced by the transnational connections they had with people living in other countries and with sources of information originating from abroad. In the next section I will discuss transnational cultural flows and transnational social fields and their effect on the Roma in Helsinki I studied.

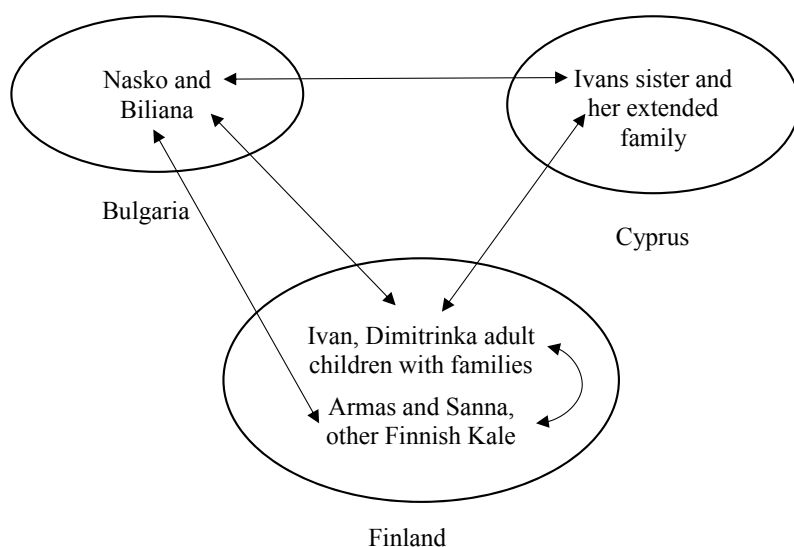
#### **4.7 Transnational Cultural Flows and Transnational Social Fields**

National belonging plays an important role in the self-identification of both Finnish and East European Roma as well as in their interaction. The fact that the East European Roma in Finland I studied are in close connection with their country of origin and many of them, especially those of the older generation, are interested in, and follow the political development of, those countries could perhaps be characterized as having political focus and centre of identity in the country of birth. However, that would be insufficient to describe the complexity of the social relationships constituting and affecting the life of these people. In an attempt at more subtle analysis, I will employ the concepts ‘transnational cultural flows’ and ‘transnational social field’ as defined and clarified by Glick Schiller (2017:18-19). Transnational social field consists of “interlocking networks of interpersonal connections that stretch across borders.” In this setting “network” stands for a chain of social relationships extending from a single individual. A social field as a concept is utilized for a societal level of analysis; nevertheless a social field is always created

by actual individuals, socializing with each other. This makes it possible to describe indirect connections between individuals who may be unknown to each other but still influence each other's lives (Glick Schiller 1999; Schiller and Fouron 2001; Schiller and Fouron 1999). It is important to distinguish between transnational cultural flow and transnational social field. Transnational cultural flow, according to Glick-Schiller, may involve personal interaction and relationships but it is not dependent on them. Transnational cultural flow may be induced by spreading information on paper, electronic or other media. People may listen to the radio, read books, watch movies or search for information on the internet across borders. All this brings new ideas and feelings that may eventually affect the actual social relations of people but is important to discern between transnational imaginaries and social fields.

In my view, Finnish and East European Roma are both involved in transnational social fields as well as being affected by transnational cultural flows. Both of these eventually affect their relationships here in Finland. Many Finnish Roma and East European Roma individuals have been connected through transnational networks, since the fall of the Iron Curtain and opening of the East European Bloc countries to be influenced by the West. The first connections for Finnish Pentecostal Roma were established through evangelizing trips in East Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. Utilizing transnational networks based on ethnic and religious belonging, many East European Roma have been able to emigrate to the West. While residing in the new country, however, they are still engaged in transnational networks with their relatives and friends in their country of origin as well as with those of their relatives who have migrated to other countries. The people who stayed in their original country in turn become involved in transnational social fields through their interaction with the relatives abroad. To draw out how this works in practice, I will give an example from some of the main participants in my research and part of their transnational network – people who I know personally. Many of their relatives and friends have emigrated from Bulgaria and their transnational network is much wider.

Ivan, a Bulgarian Roma, made his first transnational connections with Finnish Roma in 1995, when an evangelizing group of Finnish Roma Pentecostals visited his village and his home. That visit gave rise to friendships that were loosely maintained through the years. In 2008 he and his wife migrated to Finland through a connection with a Finnish-Bulgarian Pentecostal family. While in Finland he has been in contact with some Finnish Pentecostal Roma as well as with his children and family in Bulgaria and the part of his family who had migrated to Cyprus. Within a few years, three of his four children migrated to Finland together with their spouses. His eldest son stayed in Bulgaria, since he was pastoring the local church. When I asked Ivan about his church attendance, he said that he attends his home church in Bulgaria through a Skype connection. He also sends his financial support for the church to the pastor, his eldest son Nasko, to Bulgaria. When Finnish Roma Pentecostals travel to Bulgaria, they ask Ivan to find a contact and Ivan connects them with Nasko or other pastors in Bulgaria. Thus Nasko and his family have become involved in the transnational social field, even though they themselves never migrated.



**Diagram 1** Connections between people and places made by Ivan and his relatives

Another example of such transnational connection is a charity venture that a group of Finnish Roma are running in one of the Roma settlements in Bulgaria close to the Black Sea coast. They established a wholesale flea market for clothes in the city of Sredets in 2011. The idea of this business was to donate clothes from Finland to the wholesale shop and with this income to hire people from the local Roma slums. They work together with the local Roma churches. Currently there are five salaried jobs in this venture, and the activities in Bulgaria are directed by a local pastor. The charity also provides financial and social support for the school attendance of 50 children living in the slum. Starting in the autumn of 2018, the organization is planning to open a free preschool for Roma children. Currently the state-provided preschools and schools in Bulgaria are partly paid and even small fees in practice block the attendance of children from the slums.



Figure 21 Information leaflet of the project “Извор на Надеждата“, “Spring of Hope”

In addition, all the participants of the research are influenced by transnational cultural flows. They watch movies, most of which are American, search the internet and share videos of sermons of world-famous Pentecostal preachers or testimonies (stories telling about the supernatural power of God) with each other. The influence of those global religious and secular cultural flows should not be underestimated. My impression is that the worldviews of the majority of my informants, their ways of thinking and attitudes, are at least as strongly influenced by media and the transnational cultural flows it carries, as by Roma or national traditions. For example, the way many Bulgarian *Kardarashi* young women dress nowadays differs a lot from the tradition which was upheld until the end of the communist regime in the country. In the past they were obliged to wear long skirts and cover their heads with scarfs if they were married. Today most of them could hardly be distinguished from the majority population by their dress. The marriage traditions of the group have also changed and are envisioned by members of the group as being more contemporary. That is confirmed also by the statement of one of the women I came to know:

*Our Gypsies, Kardarashi, have already reconciled (settled) with a more contemporary way of life and we do not insist any more that we marry only our “natsia”(Roma group), we are freer now. There are women that are married to Americans, Italians, wherever they meet love. There are ones that are married to “kopanari” (another Roma group) and even to Negros. They try to enter the contemporary world. (Kardarashi woman 16.9.2015)*

The people I met in Day Centres spent much of the day watching American movies. Those who had accommodation but were unemployed entertained themselves similarly. Most of them had Facebook accounts and actively followed the posts of their “FB friends” living in different countries and the general information flow displayed there. My interpretation is that that these facts could not help but influence Roma worldviews. And the point of this is that Roma are always in relation with non-Roma people, and are likely to be influenced by those people and it is also that modernity and technology have gradually

changed a group of people that used to be more devoted to their own cultural patterns. Roma have always engaged with non-Roma; maintaining a distinction (which occurs on both sides), but also mutual influence. Roma are not an isolated and alien group living amongst others; this ethnographic work has demonstrated time and again that Roma constantly draw from their interactions with other people and other places – and this contributes strongly to the differences perceived between the Roma groups in Helsinki. At the same time transnational cultural and religious flows tend to influence Roma and non-Roma alike, accounting for more possibilities of commonality between different Roma groups.



Figure 22 Facebook update from the visit of Benny Hinn in Bulgarian Pentecostal Church in 2016

Some of the Pentecostal families I knew would often refer to Bible teachings and testimonies they had seen on Facebook or internet, usually originating from the USA or Australia, sometimes in Brazil. This was the case with the close relatives of Ivan's family. One of them also posted on Facebook pictures from the visit of a renowned American prosperity Gospel preacher Benny Hinn to their local church in Bulgaria (23.9.2016) and praying for their close relative. To my understanding the preaching of some Bulgarian Roma pastors had likely been affected by these international flows in the direction of the theology of prosperity, basically suggesting that all faithful Christians can expect to be blessed with health and wealth, more so than non-Christians.

Transnational cultural flows as well as participation in transnational social fields influence the worldviews, value systems and relationships of the participants of my research, providing more common ground for interaction between different Roma groups. At the same time being of different citizenship and the rights and obligations that follow are a source of inequality between different Roma groups in Helsinki. In the next chapter I will address the influence of difference in citizenship on the relationship of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Helsinki.

#### **4.8 Citizenship and Social Security**

Having different citizenship and residency places people in different and often unequal positions in society. Nordic countries are known for strictly regulating entry into their territory and granting residence rights but at the same time for providing welfare and significant income redistribution among citizens and legal residents (Djuve et al. 2015:9-10). As Finnish Kale are Finnish citizens, they are entitled to the welfare support provided by the Finnish state and the municipalities they live in. In addition to basic social care, many municipalities even provide supplementary income support for purchasing traditional Kale skirts. For example, the traditional skirt support provided by Helsinki City for 2011 amounted to 410 euro/year (Jakonen 2011). The decision is based on Governmental Decrees advocating the rights of

Roma to develop their culture. Throughout fieldwork, on several occasions Finnish Roma have questioned, “Why don’t Romanian and Bulgarian Roma get accommodation and social support in Finland? Isn’t there anyone to take care of them?” Much of the interaction between Finnish and East European Roma have indeed comprised efforts on behalf of the Finnish Roma to help their East European friends enter the social security of the Finnish state. In many cases they succeed, but this requires substantial sacrifices on the part of the hosts in the first months and even up to a few years. During this period the Finnish Kale provide lodging for their friends and support them in finding employment. The East European Roma in turn would help with household work.

In a recent article Tervonen and Enache (2017) address the bordering actions taken towards East European Roma who visit and stay in Finland without entering its labour market. The focus is mostly on the Helsinki region. The researchers found that the state actors have not been able to form a policy, or have employed a “policy of no policy”, in addressing the evident and at times appalling social problems of homeless people, many of whom are in acute need of health care (Tervonen and Enache 2017:1127). Especially during the winter, being homeless even for a single night in a Nordic country, where temperatures easily drop below -20°C, is potentially lethal. In my view the policy of the Finnish state towards the social security offered to EU migrants has been fairly explicit. Social security is extended to all permanent residents of Finland. EU citizens are entitled to social security when they are resident in Finland for work as employees or under self-employment. (Kela 2017). Since East European Roma earning their living on the streets of Helsinki are not able to provide proof of employment, they are not eligible for residence or for the social security benefits of the country. The underlying assumption is that every EU state provides social security and healthcare for its residents.

On the other hand, understandably, dealing with poor, homeless, sometimes acutely ill or otherwise vulnerable people such as elders or pregnant women under the conditions of the harsh Nordic climate



posed a serious moral dilemma for all the people closely involved with them. These were usually social workers at Day Centres, workers at the municipality shelters the immigrants were denied access to, healthcare professionals, NGO activists, religious affiliates, friendly volunteers as well as researchers. The moral dilemma deepened during 2015-2016, when the crisis in Syria created a massive wave of refugees throughout Europe and Finland accepted more than 30000 refugees. During the end of my fieldwork, Finnish Roma as well as East European Roma informants continually discussed the situation. Their question was: why did the Finnish state respond to the humanitarian emergency of the refugees but ignore the plight of the East European Roma dwelling in the country?

After joining the evangelizing meetings that Finnish Kale organized for East European Roma, Jussi and Mirjami, the Finnish Kale couple who had recently moved from Sweden, started to visit Hirundo Day Centre 2-3 times a week. They provided humanitarian help to the visitors to Hirundo in the form of food and clothes. Jussi and Mirjami felt that it was their calling from God to collect food whose “best before” date was approaching from the shops in the neighbourhood, and distribute it to needy families and East European Roma migrants. They had managed to make an agreement with a few shop owners who were glad to hand over food that would be otherwise have gone into the garbage. The couple bought large freezers where they could store the surplus of food before distribution. In the spring of 2015 I visited Hirundo almost daily and met Jussi and Mirjami often. We often discussed the situation of East European Roma migrants in Finland. Jussi and Mirjami wondered why the Finnish welfare state did not extend its protection to East European Roma, who were fleeing from hunger and unbearable marginalization in their homelands, but at the same time a large number of refugees were accepted from abroad and given shelter and food immediately. Following the same thoughts and ideas in the late autumn of 2015, a few Finnish Kale activist, following the lead of Janniina Grönfors, approached leaders of the Lutheran church and Helsinki municipality with an appeal to arrange emergency accommodation for East European Roma

during the winter. One of their arguments was, “What makes East European Roma less human than the refugees of the Syrian war and why is humanitarian help extended to one but not to the other?” An interesting detail was that Janniina Grönfors was not a Roma activist but a stay-at-home mom who found the situation of the immigrant Roma unbearable and decided to put in all her efforts to change it. My guess is that many doors opened to Janniina because of the similarity of her name to Janette Grönfors, who is a publicly known Roma activist. Nevertheless, to the amazement of many who followed the process, her initiative brought a result and an emergency shelter was opened for the East European immigrants. Since Janniina is Pentecostal and several others of the participants were also Pentecostal, they interpreted these events as a prayer answer. The discussions about the way East European Roma in Finland were treated in comparison with Syrian refugees were ongoing not only among Roma activists but also among Finnish Kale in general, who saw it as another indication that Roma are treated unfairly in all situations, everywhere in the world.

In general, a lot of the cooperation between East European Roma and mostly Pentecostal Finnish Kale in Helsinki I witnessed during my fieldwork was aiming at combating the inequality experienced by East European Roma immigrants with respect to the support provided by the Finnish welfare state. In many cases Finnish Kale succeeded in helping their friends to get access to Finnish social security or to persuade authorities to provide additional support for the East European Roma immigrants. Some Finnish Kale, especially but not only the ones belonging to Charismatic Christian congregations, actively assist their East European fellows with lodging, searching for employment and handling legal issues like resident permits and social security applications. Often it is the Finnish Kale who approach East European Roma. They could meet and start talking in different places. As the Romanian Roma whose expression I took as a title for this work put it, “*They look me in the eyes and I smile and then we know*”. One of the main participants of this research, Jasmin, a Finnish Kale woman, met the Bulgarian Roma

family she started supporting and taking care of in the parking lot in front of her local grocery store. Joan Calin, a Romanian Roma who has been interviewed by Finnish national media (Koskinen 2015), met Finnish Kale on the streets of Helsinki, while he was playing the accordion. Eventually it was Tuula Åkerlund, the director of Romano Missio, the oldest national Roma organization in Finland, who helped Joan to find employment and settle in Finland.

People often meet at Christian meetings, as was the case of Finnish Kale couple Jussi and Mirjami and Bulgarian Roma couple Radostin and Milena. East European Roma also approach Finnish Kale while begging or selling newspapers on the streets. The East European Roma who are already settled in Finland occasionally contact Finnish Kale NGOs asking for help with finding employment or handling paperwork. This was the case for Ivan and the other East European Roma who received an opportunity for a work trial at NRFF. Some Finnish Kale NGOs as well as private persons also advocate for East European Roma on a political as well as social level. For example, the NRFF and Romano Missio participated in initiating the negotiations for an emergency shelter for East European Roma within the municipality of Helsinki and the Lutheran church during the winter of 2015-2016. The initiative resulted in two complaints to the Parliamentary Deputy Ombudsman concerning the expulsion of Roma from Eastern Europe from the emergency shelter of Helsinki municipality to the -25 degree frost in January 2016. Consequently, during the winter of 2016-2017, Helsinki offered emergency accommodation for all, regardless of citizenship (Ikävalko 2016; Parliamentary Ombudsman 2017). Angelica Vironen addressed the minister of internal affairs at the time, Päivi Räsänen, at a celebration of the international Roma day in Hirundo Day Center on 8.4.2015, asking for humanitarian help and social support for East European Roma begging on the streets of Helsinki.

## 4.9 Conclusion

The interaction of Finnish Roma with East European Roma in Finland cannot be well described and understood without taking the influence of nationality on their relationship into account. The participants of this research were mainly Finnish, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma. For all these three groups, fieldwork experience showed nationality to be an important identifier, which influenced their daily life significantly. For Bulgarian and Finnish Roma, national identity is clearly connected to the territory of one's land of origin. Finnish Kale have a strong memory of their ancestors fighting in the wars to preserve the independence of the Finnish state. Some Bulgarian Roma refer to their land of birth in a way similar to the findings of Malkki (1992:27) that people can see themselves as rooted in a place and derive their strength and identity in an arborescent manner. Division of territory according to nationality was also present in the daily life of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma in Finland. These groups divided the spaces and the facilities of the Day Centre they visited regularly, as well as the areas of the town in which they practiced economic activities.

Fieldwork provided good possibilities to examine the relation of different Roma groups to place in general. In research literature on Roma there are two contradictory views on Roma as inherently nomadic /peripatetic people and Roma nomadism as imagined. The data from the current research confirms neither of these theories. Rather the attitude of the informants towards traveling as a way of life or a way of generating income appeared to be characteristic to each group. Some people were as sedentary as the majority population of their country of origin, some were clearly semi-sedentary – inhabiting their privately-owned houses during the winter and travelling for work during the warm season. Some groups had a strong memory of their ancestors (usually parents or grandparents) as travelling people, who had become sedentary through forceful sedentarization or through changes in the housing policy of the state.

My observation was that these people were more prone to changing locations frequently or to practise a semi-sedentary way of life.

Some of the Finnish Kale informants saw transnational Roma identity as contradictory to their Finnish national identity. They wanted to be seen as a national minority of Finland, rather than as members of a transnational Roma community. Their major concern was that being associated with the newcomer East European Roma migrants might spoil their image and jeopardize their position as Finnish nationals and people respected in Finland. Similar points of view are discussed broader in the research literature on Roma. In general, it could be said that Finnish Roma are grateful to be a part of the Finnish nation, regardless of the marginalization they had experienced. Most of the Finnish Kale I know are proud of being Finns, which is an important part of their identity. For example, when I met the Lindberg family for the first time, I asked Armas's wife Sanna whether she was a Finn, meaning whether she belonged to the majority population. Armas interfered stating that he is a Finn as well and I could sense that my question was offensive to him. Similarly, most of the Swedish-speaking Finns I know are nearly offended when asked whether they are Swedes. On the other hand, East European Roma, while identifying as nationals of their country of origin, regardless of the nostalgia and missing kin and loved ones, are mostly bitter towards their "homelands". Many of the younger generation of East European Roma who have settled in Finland want to see themselves as part of the Finnish society. Time will show whether these people will participate in the social life of both these social groups according to the principle of simultaneity, as described by Glick-Schiller (2017:17). For the older generation, probably also due to their low proficiency in Finnish language, their "political focus and centre of identity" comes across as being in their land of origin as they follow the political and social life in the country closely through different media.

In my understanding the interaction of Finnish and East European Roma in Finland is part of the process of creating transnational social fields, conceptualised by Glick Schiller (2017:18-19) as “interlocking networks of interpersonal connections that stretch across borders.” Typically, East European Pentecostal Roma in Finland would introduce their Finnish Roma Pentecostal friends to their friends and relatives back home, thus establishing new transnational connections. With time, some of them develop into close and long-lasting relationships. In addition, both Finnish Kale and East European Roma are affected by transnational cultural flows in the forms of movies, music and or Pentecostal and Charismatic teaching and music on the internet. The ideas and attitudes promoted by these cultural flows create a common base for understanding.

The current research enhances our understanding of how people negotiate their associations with different nations and locations. Roma identity is not connected to any specific location in the sense of belonging. Historically the Roma did not form a territory-based nation. At present some Roma groups appear to be as sedentary as the surrounding population, whereas others practise a semi-sedentary way of life. Regardless of the degree of mobility however, the participants of my research clearly associate themselves with different locations and/or territory-based nations. The research indicates that this association may also change over the lifespan of an individual. For example, some of the Bulgarian Roma participants of the research, who had arrived in Helsinki after a few years of residence in France, would claim that they are “from France” without insisting on being French. At the same time, it was important for them to be seen as Bulgarians and Bulgarian Roma, especially if the specific situation allowed for juxtaposition with Romanians and Romanian Roma. After a couple of years residing in Finland however, they claimed that returning to Finland after a short trip abroad “feels like coming home”, since they experienced life in Finland as relatively secure and predictable. Some elder Bulgarian Roma could be satisfied with their life in Finland for several years as it provided them financial security, independence

and, most of the time, relief from the stigmatization they had experienced in Bulgaria. At the same time, they would be waiting to reach retirement age and return “back home” to Bulgaria.

Last but not least, being of different citizenship is a source of substantial social inequality between Finnish Roma and East European Roma living in Finland. A considerable part of the interaction between the groups is aiming at overcoming that difference. In this chapter I have discussed how national belonging affects the relationship between Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Helsinki. Roma in Helsinki combined their nationality, religious identity and ethnic identity in a variety of different ways at different times. Most of the time these different identifications co-existed, rather than blending. I will discuss the interplay of these identifications and their effect on people’s everyday lives in the concluding chapter.

## 5. Conclusions

When I look back at the process through which this work came into existence, I see it coming from three major sources – the public interest in the newly arrived East European Roma in Finland during the first years after Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, my personal engagement with Roma peoples and my participation in the Pentecostal movement. Begging on the streets of Helsinki and the sight of groups of homeless foreign people, often families with children, camping in the outskirts of the town were new social phenomena for the welfare state of Finland. These issues often appeared in the media headlines at the time. In my eyes, the reactions of journalists, politicians and ordinary people alike were most often a mixture of fear, pity and confusion. Fear of the unknown – most of the local people did not know what to expect from begging homeless newcomers; pity – as many understood that the East European Roma were fleeing unbearable poverty and marginalisation in their lands of origin; and confusion – as to what Finland as a state or private people could do to resolve the situation. In this setting, a fresh research-based exploration of the “Language, Identity and Authenticity” of the new migrants from the perspective of political science, anthropology, migration research and anthropological and general Romani linguistics, which was offered by the project in which I participated, was welcome.

My previous experience of the Roma and communication between different Roma groups prompted me to think that my research could bring a positive and encouraging perspective to the existing public debate. I had seen several cases in which Finnish Roma had assisted East European Roma to find their place in the new country, and wanted to investigate further: what were the factors influencing the establishment and maintenance of their relationship? Turning to earlier research on Roma, mostly in anthropology and ethnology but also in other fields of Romani Studies, I realized that studies had mostly focused upon single Roma groups, drawing a strong boundary around the group. In contrast, the focus of my research has been on how the Roma in Helsinki position themselves in the world in general and towards each



other as representatives of different groups in particular. During this process, the question of what this study could suggest about the way we, as people, position ourselves in the world in general also arose. Last but not least, the Pentecostal church played an important role in the initiation and execution of this research. It was through the Pentecostal church that I got acquainted and involved with Roma in Finland and Bulgaria in the first place. The gatherings and evangelizing activities initiated by Pentecostals also became fieldwork sites in the course of the study.

In this work I have investigated how ethnicity, religion and nationality engage with each other in the interaction of Finnish Kale and East European Roma in Helsinki. I have described how people negotiate the balance between different identities in the constantly ongoing process of identification that accompanies this balancing: in the act of differentiating identities, or bringing them together, they become meaningful in particular ways. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in the case of most of the Finnish Kale and several of the East European Roma, my understanding is that they saw their own Roma identity as being an ethnic identity. This ethnic identity was defined by their common origin in the terms of the principle of descent from an assumed common ancestor (blood and kinship) as well as by the distinctive “Kaale kulttuuri” (“Kale culture”) or Romani language and Roma traditions in the case of East European Roma. However, the cultural commonality perceived by informants clearly relied more on the experience of common understanding than it did on any demonstrable similarity of the cultural traditions noted by Bashkow (2004:452), or similar values, described by Hancock (2010, 23-24) as “core Roma culture”. I would suggest that, in this case, “the discourse on ethnicity has escaped from the academy and into the field”, as argued by Banks (1996:189). As ethnicity and ethnic identity are abstract concepts defined in academia, rather than ontological things existing in the world, it is possible to discuss how much social reality has influenced the creation of the concepts and how much the concepts have in turn influenced social reality. In addition, as argued by Strathern (1987:26) in her article on “The limits of auto-

anthropology”, as anthropology was invented in Western European countries, the models and concepts that anthropologists use for social relations are the same as those that ordinary people living in those countries use in their everyday lives. For this reason, in anthropological studies of European countries, figuring out which concepts are derived from theoretical models and which are ethnographic concepts used in social life is at times challenging. Based on my own fieldwork experience, I argue that for most of the Roma with whom I worked, ethnic identity was a meaningful concept, and many Roma felt that it reflected their social reality and gave them the chance to define themselves as people or “ascribe themselves a name”, as argued by Foucault (Foucault 2002:132). The use of the concept has arguably also altered social reality at times, most obviously in terms of ethnic mobilisation.

In the process of identification, certain identities influence one another. For example, as seen in Chapter 3, for some participants of the study, more often Bulgarian Roma than Finnish Kale, religious identity could completely override Roma identity. In these cases, people felt that they belonged first and foremost to the community of the “children of God” or “Jesus’s own”, which was equated with members of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement most of the time but not always. At the same time, the importance of a certain identity could vary situationally and require the participants of the study to exercise judgement and find suitable compromises. Such was the case when Finnish Kale willingly interacted with East European Roma during the evangelising meetings they organised for these East Europeans, and found commonality and feeling of belonging based on the idea of Roma as a transnational ethnic community. Simultaneously, in different settings, the same Finnish Kale participants could deliberately keep their distance from East European Roma during occasions intended mostly for Finnish Kale. In these cases, it appeared to me that their Kale identity, and the social obligation deriving from it, prevailed. Often the interplay of different social identities was crucial to the outcome of the encounters between representatives of different Roma groups. Representatives of different Roma groups, Finnish Kale and

East European Roma, but also different Bulgarian or Romanian Roma groups, who as part of their religious identity did not associate themselves with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, would recognise each other as Roma most of the time but avoid close contact. In contrast, most of the participants in my research, who were members of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, would gladly interact with each other. Some of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Kale would even make substantial sacrifices in order to support needy East European Roma persons or families. As I describe in Chapter 4, differences in nationality appeared to me to be strongly emphasised in cases where people did not subscribe to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. Finnish Kale often emphasised that they were exclusively *Finnish* Roma and many did not want to be associated in any way with the newcomer East European Roma. The nationality of Bulgarian and Romanian non-Pentecostal and Charismatic Roma was also strongly emphasised and an important delimiter. Based on national belonging, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma divided resources and territory among themselves, both in terms of different areas of the town, as well as inside the Day Centre they used the most.

Roma identity, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, and nationality can also be seen as three different, though related, social fields (or, perhaps better, sub-fields) as described by Bourdieu (1995:66-68), in the sense that each of them has its own rules and demands. The concept of social fields is complicated. Here I will attempt to formulate it concisely from the point of view of those parts of it that are most applicable to my research. Bourdieu developed the concept “social field” from the term “field” used in games. In a game the “field” refers to the pitch or board on which a game is played, and the rules of the game associated with it. It is characteristic of the field that it is a deliberately designed social construct limited in time and space. The participants of the game consciously enter or exit the game, although at times it may happen that someone gets carried away by the game and forgets that it is “only a game”. In contrast, social fields are “the product of long, slow process of autonomisation” and can be

regarded as “games in themselves”. The earlier a person enters the game of a social field, the less they are conscious of all the knowledge necessary to operate in the field because belief, in the form of naive and unconditional compliance with the presuppositions of the field, is an essential part of belonging to a field. Holding such belief is an entry condition tacitly demanded by all social fields. This is why social fields cannot be entered merely by the person willing it. According to Bourdieu, people are typically born into a social field and internalise its canon unconsciously through the process of socialisation or alternatively through a “slow co-option and initiation which is equivalent to a second birth” (Bourdieu and Nice 1995:68).

The process of learning to live within Roma and national sub-fields in Helsinki began from the moment of birth for the participants of this research; entering the sub-field of Pentecostalism and acquiring full membership of the Pentecostal church in formal terms happened a bit later; joining Pentecostalism always requires an initiation in the form of water baptism and is indeed referred to as “being born again”, even for those who have been born into Pentecostal families. Full membership of the sub-field of Pentecostalism requires unconditional belief in some of the basic principles of Christianity, such as those stated in the Apostles' Creed<sup>17</sup>. Such belief is an essential part of the condition of “being born again”. In practice, most of the children of Pentecostals learn the rules of the sub-field in the course of socialisation into their families and churches. However, those who do not hold such unconditional belief in adulthood are not regarded as “born again” nor as members of that social sub-field.

In certain life situations, social sub-fields influence the lives of people independently but in others they may overlap and influence each other. For example, all of the participants in my research were Roma and participated in the Roma sub-field but not all of them were Pentecostal, and not all participated in

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<sup>17</sup> The Apostles' Creed is a statement of Christian belief drafted in the early stages of Christianity, used by several Christian denominations.

Pentecostal events. All of them were nationals of some country but nationality was a more influential factor, and the national sub-field was socially enacted whenever representatives of different nationalities were present. At Roma Pentecostal gatherings, people followed the rules of the Roma and Pentecostalism sub-fields most closely, although the rules of the nationality sub-field were also often obeyed. At a Day Centre attended by Romanian and Bulgarian Roma, most of whom were not Pentecostal, the rules were defined mostly by combinations of the Roma and nationality sub-fields.

Regarding nationality, ethnicity and religion as three different social sub-fields makes it possible to discuss how people live within these fields and how they sometimes follow the rules of one and at other times follow the rules of another. For example, the same Bulgarian and Romanian Roma might behave differently if they met in the settings of a Day Centre or at a Pentecostal gathering. People's identities are not necessarily affected by these social and strategic choices of how to live in different fields; this approach allows a focus on how people live and experience their lives without having to establish what this says about their identities.

The study also points to the complexity that religious faith introduces into people's lives. Many of the Finnish Kale participating in the research felt a moral obligation, based on their faith, to support the newcomer East European Roma migrants and to attempt to alleviate their hardship. At the same time, they needed to protect their homes and immediate circle of kin and friends. They also found themselves caught between the conflicting demands of their religious faith and the cultural norms of their group. I see this as an example of how Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, described by Coleman as part-culture and by Robbins as universalism encountering particularity, come into edgy contact with local cosmologies and cultural norms. (Coleman 2006:3; Robbins 2010:648)

In an article on grey zones at the European peripheries, Green (2015:183) discusses the coexistence of border regimes, running in parallel with each other without influencing each other. It refers to a dispute

between the Greek and Turkish governments concerning a pair of uninhabited islets, called Imia in Greece and Kardak in Turkey. In 1995-1996 the two countries had a disagreement about whether those rocky islets belonged to Greece or Turkey. The dispute was initiated in December 1995 when a Turkish cargo ship accidentally ran aground on one of these islets but refused to accept the emergency help offered by the Greek coast guard on the basis that the islet was Turkish territory. The Greek and Turkish embassies had a disagreement concerning where exactly the national border between those two countries was drawn. Greek media interpreted the event as a Turkish attempt to annex Greek territory. The dispute quickly escalated with the Greek and Turkish militaries becoming involved, as well as the prime ministers of the country and even an envoy sent by the USA. The Turkish side held that the Imia/Kardak rocks were a part of a “grey zone”, including many more small islets in the Aegean, as they were not explicitly named in any agreements. The Greek understanding of the issue was that “grey zones” was an invention of Turkish politics aiming at inducing uncertainty about a part of Greek territory. That was an example of how one border regime operated – the disagreement was caused by different interpretations of the meaning of words defining the location of the border.

At the same time, Greece and Turkey were among the 29 Mediterranean and adjacent countries who signed an EU-initiated agreement as part of the Barcelona Process, aimed at improving the political, social and economic cooperation of Mediterranean countries. The political tension between Turkey and Greece caused by the Imia/Kardak dispute did not affect the agreements organised by the EU, which included and went beyond the Aegean region. In this case, as Green suggests, (2015:178) “at the same moment relations between Turkey and Greece both worsened and improved”. This was an example of two border regimes and two ways of conceptualising the difference between ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’, which could coexist simultaneously without influencing each other.

Analogously, in my research Roma identity and religious identification with Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity could be viewed as two different logics of distinguishing between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which could coexist at the same time and place. As with the differences between coexisting border regimes described earlier, in the current study Roma identity and Pentecostalism interact in a way that strengthens and intensifies the commonality felt by the participants.

The current research also provides an opportunity to explore the complicated relation of Roma with location. Even though Roma identity is by definition not connected to a specific location in the world, rather being connected with not having a specific location in the terms of “homeland to stay in or return to”, all of the participants in the research expressed clear belonging to specific locations and location-based nations. The perception of “home as location” can change over the lifespan of an individual. Several of the East European Roma who had recently settled in Finland described Finland as their home, where they had found security and hope for the future. Similarly, Roma in Slovenia, as studied by Speizer (2016:186), characterised “home” as a place of safety and peace, whose actual location could change. In contrast, the feeling of belonging to a specific location-based nation in terms of origin appeared to me to be very pronounced. Finnish Roma continued to be Finnish Roma even if they had lived abroad, usually in Sweden, for several generations. Similarly, Bulgarian Roma were still Bulgarian Roma, even if their home was in Finland.

Throughout this research project I have pondered the role of religion and belief in the life of the people I studied, but also in academic writing. My thoughts have been much in line with Luehrmann’s (2015) statement that “today, many historians and social scientists are concerned with whether disciplines committed to methodological suspension of belief can do justice to the religious world” (Luehrmann 2015:167). My observation has been that, very often, anthropological writing on Christianity focuses on the social and cultural aspects of the phenomena and shies away from its spiritual side. One reason could

be that many anthropologists have been born and raised in communities in which Christianity as a religion has been part of the local cultural heritage. On the other hand, I have been positioned on the other side of that issue. Being a member of the Charismatic Christian community, I have wondered whether my methodological scrutiny of the ethnographic data has been sufficiently objective and to what extent my own beliefs have influenced my conclusions. In any case, as Luehrmann (2015:168) suggests, understanding the life of people “across ideological and experiential boundaries” is challenging. In my view, the abilities of both an insider and an outsider of a specific life experience to present and analyse it are valuable; at best, they complement each other. I consider my being, at the beginning of my research, an insider to Pentecostalism but an outsider to anthropology as an opportunity to examine the experiences of the participants of my research from a slightly different perspective than has traditionally been done in anthropological research. On the other hand, my position as an anthropologist could perhaps be described as a classical one in reverse. For most of the research done in anthropology, the researchers have held beliefs that they do not share with the people they study. In my case I hold beliefs that I share with many of the participants of the research, but which seem to challenge or contradict the beliefs of fellow anthropologists.

As a concluding remark, I argue that most of the Roma I met in Helsinki, Kale and East European Roma alike, did recognise each other as Roma, based on Roma identity, which they perceived as ethnic identity. How they acted on it depended on several additional factors. As I mentioned in the Introduction of this work, like technical drawing, research in social sciences captures a limited number of perspectives of social reality at a time. I suggest that it is useful to analyse the interaction of different Roma groups in Helsinki as well as how people in general position ourselves in the world from at least two perspectives – identity and social fields. Identity and social fields are connected to each other. For example, according to Bourdieu, social fields create agents with specific habitus in order to make the field function. He also



states that the practical belief demanded from the members of the field can be better characterised as a “state of the body”, rather than a “state of mind” (Bourdieu and Nice 1995:67-68). Analysing the role of Roma, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity and nationality as social sub-fields within which people live and operate, and their relationship with people’s identities, could perhaps be the subject of a future study.

While I have described and analysed how Roma identity, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity and nationality influenced the life and the interaction of Roma in Helsinki, throughout this work it has become evident that spirituality moved the participants of the research in different ways. Belief in God and in His power to influence the life of a person was present in the speech and everyday experiences of the participants in practically all the chapters of this research. In Chapter 3, devoted to the impact of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity on the interaction of Roma in Helsinki, I have told the stories of people whose spiritual experiences and consequent conversion to Pentecostalism or other Charismatic Christian movements had a dramatic effect on their lives. Their experience was that as they “gave their hearts to Jesus”, they were “touched by the Holy Spirit” and received a “new heart”, which essentially meant a new moral code. The new moral code, in connection with the new social environment of a Pentecostal or other Charismatic congregation, resulted in a complete turn, in the case of those people – liberation from substance abuse and anger, avoidance of violent resolution of conflicts and a search for a new constructive behaviour and peaceful life. For most of the participants of this research, the decisions they made and the turns their life took were often powerfully influenced by their spirituality. In several cases the entire course of their life was changed significantly by what they experienced as divine intervention.

## 6. Epilogue

I will finish this work with an extract of my diary towards the end of my fieldwork period. It describes an occasion when a Finnish Kale family literally picked up a Bulgarian Roma couple from the street in the late autumn of 2015. The Kale family arranged for a flat, a box of food and cleaning necessities for their Bulgarian Roma friends and thought them how to follow the Kale cultural traditions in the flat. In my opinion it is a good example of what Roma cooperation in Helsinki is like at its best.

*In the afternoon of 29.10.2015 we went with Mirjami for ice-cream and smoothies at the local McDonald's. First we brought her daughter Carme (endearment name for Carmen) to Pitäjänmäki, where she was to meet her friends. On the way in the car I asked Carme how it felt to be a mommy. Mirjami told me that I would not get an answer to that question. Carme was quiet. "Ok," I smiled, "Then how does it feel to be a parent to your little girl?" "You cannot get an answer to that question either" Mirjami replied again. "One cannot always get what one wants", she laughed.*

*"Ok, I give up," I said.*

*As we left Carme with her friends, I asked Mirjami what the problem with my question had been. She replied that it would have been inappropriate for Carme to speak about anything referring to childbearing in the presence of her mother. An appropriate question would have been "How has it gone with the girl?"*

*We went to McDonald's and discussed some personal things. Mirjami also said that Carme had resigned the contract for her apartment, and the flat would be empty for the next month. In a while, we left together for the prayer meeting. After the meeting, I brought Mirjami to her house and went back home. Just when I was preparing to take a shower, the phone*

*rang. It was Jussi. Normally I didn't answer the phone after 9 pm but I thought that Mirjami might have forgotten something in the car. Jussi asked if Radostin and Milena would like to move into Carme's apartment for a month. I replied that I would ask them and called them immediately. Radostin was almost speechless and both of them praised the Lord for His mercy. They had been homeless for about a week, sleeping under a boat on the harbour in Helsinki and wandering around the railway station. It was already the end of October and the temperature was often below freezing during the nights.*

*Mirjami, Carme and I drove to the old Hirundo address near Kalasatama. Two frozen people with tears in their eyes were waiting for us in the darkness. We brought them to Carme's apartment in Vantaa. Mirjami had also prepared them a box of food: chicken, sausage, potatoes, bread, milk, margarine, etc. When Radostin put the box on the floor, Mirjami immediately corrected him. "Naa, naa ..." she said pointing to the box on the floor in front of the elevator. I explained that food should not be placed on the floor. When we entered the flat, Mirjami explained that the cutlery of the kitchen should not be taken to any other place in the apartment and could not be put on the floor. Otherwise, they would have to throw away the cutlery that had become polluted. Carme also showed them how to use the washing machine and gave them some washing liquid... The guests were stunned... Another chapter of Roma cooperation for survival had begun! (Diary 30.10.2015)*

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## Appendix 1



### PALVELUALUEEN JOHTAJAN LUPA TUTKIMUKSEN TEKEMISEEN

Ettinen toimikunta on kokouksessaan 29.8.2013 antanut myöntävän lausunnon seuraavasta opinnäytetyöstä.

Opinnäytetyö  
AME SAM ROMA! – ME OLEMME ROMANEJA! Suomessa vierailevien ja asuvien Bulgarian romanien ja Suomen romanien keskinäinen vuorovaikutus.

Opinnäytteen tekijä  
Lidia Gripenberg

Annan luvan yllä mainitun tutkimuksen tekemiseen Helsingin Diakonissalaitoksen Päihde- ja mielenterveystyön palvelualueella.

Helsinki 5/9 2013

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pekka Tuomola", written over a horizontal line.

Pekka Tuomola  
päihde- ja mielenterveystyön johtaja

## Appendix 2



Hello, my name is Lidia Gripenberg!

I am working on doctoral theses on the interaction of Finnish Roma with East European Roma in Finland. The main focus is on the views and understanding of Roma on Romanipen as a part of their cultural and language identity. The attitudes of Roma groups towards each other are within the research scope also in the cases when the groups are reluctant to communicate with each other.

The goal of the research is to contribute to the facilitation of the integration of East European Roma. There are known practical examples that East European Roma, who are in contact with Finnish Roma get employed and integrate in to Finnish society better than average. However, there is no formal research on the subject so far.

The title of the research is “AME SAM ROMA! – WE ARE ROMA!”: The interaction between Finnish Roma People and Bulgarian Roma People Visiting or Living in Finland and it is a part of the project “Language, identity and authenticity among the East European Roma” at University of Helsinki. The thesis will be published in connection with the theses defense at Helsinki University as well as on the website of Helsinki Deaconess Institute.

Participation in the research is absolutely voluntary. The identity of the participants will be known only by the researcher.

2.6.2015  
Helsinki

Sincerely yours: *Lidia Gripenberg*  
Diploma Engineer,  
Bachelor in Social Science - Deacon